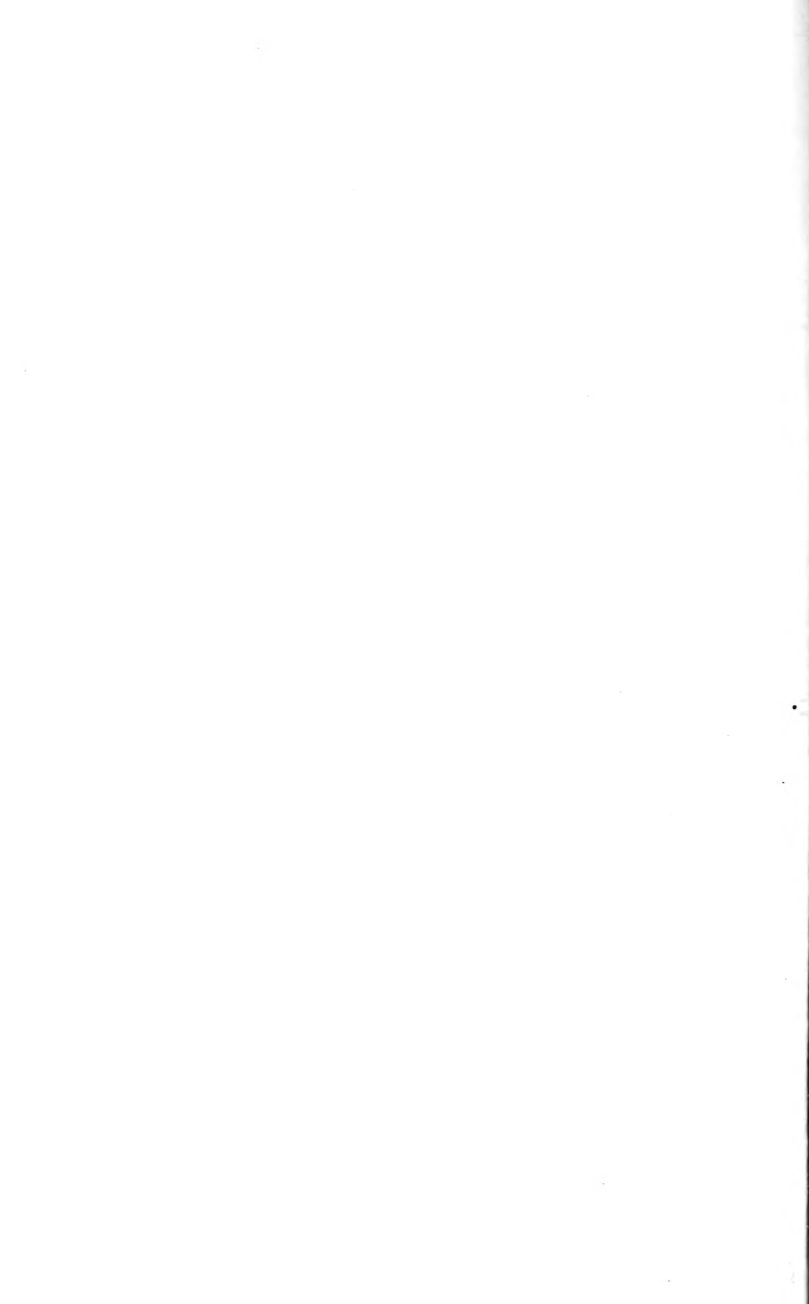




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"HEATHER AND SNOW"

A Novel

BY
GEORGE MACDONALD

AUTHOR OF

'DAVID ELGINBROD,' 'ROBERT FALCONER,' 'PHANTASTES,' ETC.



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HEATHER AND SNOW

CHAPTER XIX

FRANCIS GORDON'S CHAMPION

POOR little Phemy was in bed, and had cried herself asleep. Kirsty was more tired than she had ever been before. She went to bed at once, but, for a long time, not to sleep.

She had no doubt her parents approved of the chastisement she had given Gordon, and she herself nowise repented of it; yet the instant she lay down, back came the same sudden something that set her weeping on the hillside. As then, all un-sent for, the face of Francie Gordon, such as he was in their childhood, rose before her, but marred by her hand with stripes

of disgrace from his father's whip; and with the vision came again the torrent of her tears, for, if his father had then struck him so, she would have been bold in his defence. She pressed her face into the pillow lest her sobs should be heard. She was by no means a young woman ready to weep, but the thought of the boy-face with her blows upon it, got within her guard, and ran her through the heart. It seemed as if nevermore would she escape the imagined sight. It is a sore thing when a woman, born a protector, has for protection to become an avenger, and severe was the revulsion in Kirsty from an act of violence foreign to the whole habit, though nowise inconsistent with the character, of the calm, thoughtful woman. She had never struck even the one-horned cow that would, for very cursedness, kick over the milk-pail! Hers was the wrath of the mother, whose very presence in a calm soul is its justification—for how could it be there but by the original energy? The wrath was gone, and the mother soul turned against itself—not in judgment at all, but in irrepressible feeling. She did not

for one moment think, I repeat, that she ought not to have done it, and she was glad in her heart to know that what he had said and she had done must keep Phemy and him apart; but there was the blow on the face of the boy she had loved, and there was the reflex wound in her own soul! Surely she loved him yet with her mother-love, else how could she have been angry enough with him to strike him! For weeks the pain lasted keen, and it was ever after ready to return. It was a human type of the divine suffering in the discipline of the sinner, which with some of the old prophets takes the shape of God's repenting of the evils he has brought on his people; and was the only trouble she ever kept from her mother: she feared to wake her own pain in the dearer heart. She could have told her father; for, although he was, she knew, just as loving as her mother, he was not so soft-hearted, and would not, she thought, distress himself too much about an ache more or less in a heart that had done its duty; but as she could not tell her mother, she would not tell her father. But her father and mother

saw that a change had passed upon her, and partially, if not quite, understood the nature of it. They perceived that she left behind her on that night a measure of her gaiety, that thereafter she was yet gentler to her parents, and if possible yet tenderer to her brother.

For all the superiority constantly manifested by her in her relations with Francis, the feeling was never absent from her that he was of a race above her own ; and now the visage of the young officer in her father's old regiment never, any more than that of her play-fellow, rose in her mind's eye uncrossed by the livid mark of her whip from the temple down the cheek ! Whether she had actually seen it so, she did not certainly remember, but so it always came to her, and the face of the man never cost her a tear ; it was only that of the boy that made her weep.

Another thing distressed her even more : the instant ere she struck the first, the worst blow, she saw on his face an expression so meanly selfish that she felt as if she hated him. That expression had vanished from

her visual memory, her whip had wiped it away, but she knew that for a moment she had all but hated him—if it was indeed *all but* !

All the house was careful the next morning that Phemy should not be disturbed ; and when at length the poor child appeared, looking as if her colour was not 'ingrain,' and so had been washed out by her tears, Kirsty made haste to get her a nice breakfast, and would answer none of her questions until she had made a proper meal.

'Noo, Kirsty,' said Phemy at last, 'ye maun tell me what he said whan ye loot him ken 'at I cudna win til him 'cause ye wudna lat me !'

'He saidna muckle to that. I dinna think he had been sair missin ye.'

'I see ye're no gaein to tell me the trowth, Kirsty ! I ken by mysel he maun hae been missin me dreidfu' !'

'Ye can jeedge nae man by yersel, Phemy. Men's no like hiz lass-fowk !'

Phemy laughed superior.

‘What ken ye aboot men, Kirsty? There never cam a man near ye, i’ the w’y o’ makin up til ye!’

‘I’m no preten’in to ony exparience,’ returned Kirsty; ‘I wad only hae ye tak coonsel wi’ common sense. Is ’t likly, Phemy, ’at a man wi gran’ relations, and gran’ notions, a man wi’ a fouth o’ grit leddies in ’s acquaintance to mak a fule o’ him and themsel’s thegither, special noo ’at he’s an offisher i’ the Company’s service—is ’t ony gait likly, I say, ’at he sud be as muckle ta’en up wi’ a wee bit cuintry lassie as she cudna but be wi’ him?’

‘Noo, Kirsty, ye jist needna gang aboot to gar me mistrust ane wha’s the verra mirror o’ a’ knightly coortesy,’ rejoined Phemy, speaking out of the high-flown, thin atmosphere she thought the region of poetry, ‘for ye canna! Naething ever onybody said cud gar me think different o’ *him*!’

‘Nor naething ever he said himsel?’ asked Kirsty.

‘Naething,’ answered Phemy, with strength and decision.

‘No gien it was ’at naething wud ever gar him merry ye?’

‘That he nicht weel say, for he winna need garrin! —But he never said it, and ye needna try to threpe it upo’ me!’ she added, in a tone that showed the very idea too painful.

‘He did say’t, Phemy.’

‘Wha tellt ye? It’s lees! Somebody’s leein!’

‘He said it til me himsel. Never a lee has onybody had a chance o’ puttin intil the tale!’

‘He never said it, Kirsty!’ cried Phemy, her cheeks now glowing, now pale as death. ‘He daurna!’

‘He daured; and he daured to *me*! He said, “I wudna merry her gien baith o’ ye gaed doon upon yer knees to me!”’

‘Ye maun hae sair angert him, Kirsty, or he wudna hae said it! Of coorse he wasna to be guidit by you! He *cudna* hae meaned what he said! He wad never hae said it to me! I wuss wi’ a’ my hert I hadna latten ye til ’im! Ye hae ruined a’!’

‘Ye never loot me gang, Phemy! It was my business to gang.’

‘I see what’s intil’t!’ cried Phemy, bursting into tears. ‘Ye tellt him hoo little ye thought o’ me, and that gart him change his min’!’

‘Wud he be worth greitin aboot gien that war the case, Phemy? But ye ken it wasna that! Ye ken ’at I jist cudna du onything o’ the sort!—I’m jist ashamed to deny’t!’

‘Hoo am I to ken? There’s nae a wuman born but wad fain hae him til hersel!’

Kirsty held her peace for pity, thinking what she could say to convince her of Gordon’s faithlessness.

‘He didna say he hadna promised?’ resumed Phemy through her sobs.

‘We canna upo’ that.’

‘That’s what I’m thinkin’!’

‘I kenna what ye’re thinking, Phemy!’

‘What did ye gie him, Kirsty, whan he tauld ye—no ’at I believe a word o’ ’t—’at he wud nane o’ me?’

Kirsty laughed with a scorn none the less clear that it was quiet.

‘Jist a guid lickin,’ she answered.

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed Phemy hysterically. ‘I tellt ye ye was leein! Ye hae been naething but leein—a’ for fun, of coorse, I ken that—to mak a fule o’ me for bein fleyt!’

Despair, for a moment, seemed to overwhelm Kirsty. Was it for this she had so wounded her own soul! How was she to make the poor child understand? She lifted up her heart in silence. At last she said,—

‘Ye winna see mair o’ him this year or twa ony-gait, I’m thinkin! Gien ever ye get a scart o’ ’s pen, it’ll surprise me. But gien ever ye hae the chance, which may God forbid, tell him I said I had gien him his licks, and daured him to come and deny’t to my face. He winna du that, Phemy! He kens ower weel I wad jist gie him them again!’

‘He wud kill ye, Kirsty! *You* gie him his licks!’

‘He nicht kill me, but he’d hae a pairt o’ his licks

first!—And noo gien ye dinna believe me I winna answer a single question mair ye put to me. I hae been tellin ye—no God's trowth, it's true, but the deevil's—and it's no use, for ye winna believe a word o' 't!

Phemy rose up a pygmy Fury.

'And ye laid han' to cheek o' that king o' men, Kirsty Barclay? Lord, haud me ohn killt her! Little hauds me frae riven ye to bits wi' my twa han's!'

'I laidna han' to cheek o' Francie Gordon, Phemy; I jist throosh him wi' his father's ain ridin whup 'at my hert's like to brak to think o' 't. I doobt he'll carry the marks til's grave!'

Kirsty broke into a convulsion of silent sobs and tears.

'Kirsty Barclay, ye're a deevil!' cried Phemy in a hoarse whisper: she was spent with passion.

The little creature stood before Kirsty, her hands clenched and shaking with rage, blue flashes darting about in her eyes. Kirsty, at once controlling the

passion of her own heart, sat still as a statue, regarding her with a sad pity. A sparrow stood chattering at a big white brooding dove ; and the dove sorrowed for the sparrow, but did not know how to help the fluttering thing.

‘ Lord ! ’ cried Phemy, ‘ I’ll be cursin a’ the warl’ and God himsel, gien I gang on this gait !—Eh, ye fause wuman ! ’

Kirsty sprang upon her at one bound from her seat, threw her arms round her so that she could not move hers, and sitting down with her on her lap, said—

‘ Phemy, gien I was yer mither, I wad gie ye yer licks for sayin what ye didna i’ yer hert believe ! A’ the time ye was keepin company wi’ Francie Gordon, ye ken i’ yer ain sowl ye was never richt sure o’ him ! And nco I tell ye plainly that, although I strack him times and times wi’ my whup—and saired him weel !—I div not believe him sae ill-contrived as ye wad gar me think him. Him and me was bairns thegither, and I ken the natur o’ him, and tak his pairt again ye, for, oot o’ pride and ambition, ye’re an enemy til him : I

div not believe ever he promised to merry ye! He's behaved ill eneuch wantin that—lattin a gowk o' a lassie like you believe what ye likit, and him only carryin on wi' ye for the ploy o' 't, haeing naething to du, and sick o' his ain toom heid and still toomer hert; but a man's word's his word, and Francie's no sae ill as your tale wud mak him! There, Phemy, I hae said my say!

She loosened her arms. But Phemy lay still, and putting her arms round Kirsty's neck, wept in a bitter silence.

CHAPTER XX

MUTUAL MINISTRATION

IN a minute or so the door opened, and Steenie coming one step into the kitchen, stood and stared with such a face of concern that Kirsty was obliged to speak. I do not believe he had ever before seen a woman weeping. He shivered visibly.

‘Phemy’s no that weel,’ she said. ‘Her hert’s sae sair it gars her greit. She canna help greitin, puir dauty!’

Phemy lifted her face from Kirsty’s bosom, where, like a miserable child, she had been pressing it hard, and, seeming to have lost in the depth of her grief all her natural shyness, looked at Steenie with the most pitiful look ever countenance wore: her rage had

turned to self-commiseration. The cloud of mingled emotion and distress on the visage of Steenie wavered, shifted, changed, and settled into the divinest look of pity and protection. Kirsty said she never saw anything so unmistakably Godlike upon human countenance. Involuntarily she murmured, 'Eh, the bonny man!' He turned away from them, and, his head bent upon his breast, stood for a time utterly motionless. Even Phemy, overpowered and stilled by that last look he cast upon her, gazed at him with involuntary reverence. But only Kirsty knew that the half-witted had sought and found audience with the Eternal, and was now in his presence.

He remained in this position, Kirsty thought, about three minutes. Then he lifted his head, and walked straight from the house, nor turned nor spoke. Kirsty did not go after him: she feared to tread on holy ground uninvited. Nor would she leave Phemy until her mother came.

She got up, set the poor girl on the chair, and began to get ready the mid-day meal, hoping Phemy

would help her, and gain some comfort from activity. Nor was she disappointed. With a childish air of abstraction, Phemy rose and began, as of old in the house, to busy herself, and Kirsty felt much relieved.

‘But, oh,’ she said to herself, ‘the sairness o’ that wee herty i’ the inside o’ her!’

Phemy never spoke, and went about her work mechanically. When at length Mrs. Barclay came into the kitchen, Kirsty thought it better to leave them together, and went to find Steenie. She spent the rest of the day with him. Neither said a word about Phemy, but Steenie’s countenance shone all the afternoon, and she left him at night in his house on the Horn, still in the after-glow of the mediation which had irradiated him in the morning.

When she came home, Kirsty found that her mother had put Phemy to bed. The poor child had scarcely spoken all day, and seemed to have no life in her. In the evening an attack of shivering, with other symptoms, showed she was physically ill. Mrs. Barclay had sent for her father, but the girl was asleep

when he came. Aware that he would not hear a word casting doubt on his daughter's discretion, and fearing therefore that, if she told him how she came to be there, he would take her home at any risk, where she would not be so well cared for as at the Knowe, she had told him nothing of what had taken place; and he, thinking her ailment would prove but a bad cold, had gone back to his books without seeing her. At Mrs. Barclay's entreaty he had promised to send the doctor, but never thought of it again.

Kirsty found her very feverish, breathing with difficulty, and in considerable pain. She sat by her through the night. She had seen nothing of illness, but sympathetic insight is the first essential endowment of a good nurse.

All the night long—and Kirsty knew he was near—Steenie was roving within sight of the window where the light was burning. He did not know that Phemy was ill; pity for her heart-ache drew him thither. As soon as he thought his sister would be up, he went in: the door was never locked. She heard him,

and came to him. The moment he learned Phemy's condition, he said he would go for the doctor. In vain Kirsty begged him to have some breakfast first: he took a piece of oatcake in his hand and went.

The doctor returned with him, and pronounced the attack pleurisy. Phemy did not seem to care what became of her. She was ill a long time, and for a fortnight the doctor came every day.

There was now so much to be done, that Kirsty could seldom go with Steenie to the hill. Nor did Steenie himself care to go for any time, and was never a night from the house. When all were in bed, he would generally coil himself on a bench by the kitchen-fire, at any moment ready to answer the lightest call of Kirsty, who took pains to make him feel himself useful, as indeed he was. Although now he slept considerably better at night and less in the day, he would start to his feet at the slightest sound, like the dog he had almost ceased to imagine himself except in his dreams. In carrying messages, or in following

directions, he had always shown himself perfectly trustworthy.

Slowly, very slowly, Phemy recovered. But long before she was well, his family saw that the change for the better which had been evident in Steenie's mental condition for some time before Phemy's illness, was now manifesting itself plainly in his person. The intense compassion which, that memorable morning, roused his spirit even to the glorifying of his visage, seemed now settling in his looks and clarifying them. His eyes appeared to shine less from his brain, and more from his mind; he stood more erect; and, as encouraging a symptom, perhaps, as any, he had grown more naturally conscious of his body and its requirements. Kirsty, coming upon him one morning as he somewhat ruefully regarded his trowsers, suggested a new suit, and was delighted to see his face shine up, and hear him declare himself ready to go with her and be measured for it. She found also soon after, to her joy, that he had for some time been enlarging with hammer and chisel a certain cavity

in one of the rocks inside his house on the Horn, that he might use it for a bath.

In all these things she saw evident signs of a new start in the growth of his spiritual nature ; and if she spied danger ahead, she knew that the God whose presence in him was making him grow, was ahead with the danger also.

Steenie not only now went attired as befitted David Barclay's son, but to an ordinary glance would have appeared nowise remarkable. Kirsty ceased to look upon him with the pity hitherto colouring all her devotion ; pride had taken its place, which she buttressed with a massive hope, for Kirsty was a splendid hoper. People in the town, where now he was oftener seen, would remark on the wonderful change in him.—‘What's come to fule Steenie?’ said one of a group he had just passed. ‘Haith, he's luikin 'maist like ither fowk!’—‘I'm thinkin the deevil maun hae gane oot o' him!’ said another, and several joined in with their remarks.—‘Nae muckle o' a deevil was there to gang oot! He was aye an unco hairmless cratur!’—

‘And that saft-hertit til a’ leevin thing!’—‘He was that! I saw him ance face a score o’ laddies to proteck a poddick they war puttin to torment, whan, the Lord kens, he had need o’ a’ his wits to tak care o’ himsel!’—‘Aye, jist like him!’—‘Weel, the Lord taks care o’ him, for he’s ane o’ his ain innocents!’

Kirsty, before long, began to teach him to sit on a horse, and, after but a few weeks of her training, he could ride pretty well.

It was many weeks before Pheny was fit to go home. Her father came to see her now and then, but not very often: he had his duties to attend to; and his books consoled him.

As soon as Pheny was able to leave her room, Steenie constituted himself her slave, and was ever within her call. He seemed always to know when she would prefer having him in sight, and when she would rather be alone. He would sit for an hour at the other end of the room, and watch her like a dog without moving. He could have sat so all day, but, as soon as she was able to move about, nothing could keep

Phemy in one place more than an hour at the utmost. By this time Steenie could read a little, and his reading was by no means as fruitless as it was slow; he would sit reading, nor at all lose his labour that, every other moment when within sight of her, he would look up to see if she wanted anything. To this mute attendance of love the girl became so accustomed that she regarded it as her right, nor had ever the spoiled little creature occasion to imagine that it was not yielded her; and if at a rare moment she threw him glance or small smile—a crumb from her table to her dog—Steenie would for one joyous instant see into the seventh heaven, and all the day after dwell in the fifth or sixth. On fine clear noontides she would walk a little way with him and Snootie, and then he would talk to her as he had never done except to Kirsty, telling her wonderful things about the dog and the sheep, the stars and the night, the clouds and the moon; but he never spoke to her of the bonny man. When, on their return, she would say they had had a pleasant walk together, his delight would be unutter-

able; but all the time Steenie had not once ventured a word belonging to any of the deeper thoughts in which his heart was most at home. Was it that in his own eyes he was but a worm glorified with the boon of serving an angel? was it that he felt as if she knew everything of that kind, and he had nothing to tell her but the things that entered at his eyes and ears? or was it that a sacred instinct of her incapacity for holy things kept him silent concerning such? At times he would look terribly sad, and the mood would last for hours.

Not once since she began to get better, had Phemy alluded to her faithless lover. In its departure her illness seemed to have carried with it her unwholesome love for him; and certainly, as if overjoyed at her deliverance, she had become much more of a child. Kirsty was glad for her sake, and gladder still that Francie Gordon had done her no irreparable injury—seemed not even to have left his simulacrum in her memory and imagination. As her strength returned, she regained the childish merriment which had always

drawn Kirsty, and the more strongly that she was not herself light-hearted. Kirsty's rare laugh was indeed a merry one, but when happiest of all she hardly smiled. Perhaps she never would laugh her own laugh until she opened her eyes in heaven ! But how can any one laugh his real best laugh before that ! Until then he does not even know his name !

Phemy seemed more pleased to see her father every time he came ; and Kirsty began to hope she would tell him the trouble she had gone through. But then Kirsty had a perfect faith in her father, and a girl like Phemy never has ! Her father, besides, had never been father enough to her. He had been invariably kind and trusting, but his books had been more to his hourly life than his daughter. He had never drawn her to him, never given her opportunity of coming really near him. No story, however, ends in this world. The first volume may have been very dull, and yet the next be full of delight.

CHAPTER XXI

PHEMY YIELDS PLACE

It was the last week in November when the doctor came himself to take Phemy home to her father. The day was bright and blue, with a thin carpet of snow on the ground, beneath which the roads were in good condition. While she was getting ready, old David went out and talked to the doctor who would not go in, his wrinkled face full of light, and his heart glad with the same gladness as Kirsty's.

Mrs. Barclay and Kirsty busied themselves about Phemy, who was as playful and teasing as a pet kitten while they dressed her, but Steenie kept in the darkest corner, watching every thing, but offering no unneeded help. Without once looking or asking for him, never

missing him in fact, Phemy climbed, with David's aid, into the gig beside the doctor, at once began talking to him, and never turned her head as they drove away. The moment he heard the sound of the horse's hoofs, Steenie came quietly from the gloom and went out of the back-door, thinking no eye was upon him. But his sister's heart was never off him, and her eyes were oftener on him than he knew.

Of late he had begun again to go to the hill at night, and Kirsty feared his old trouble might be returning. Glad as she was to serve Phemy, and the father through the daughter, she was far from regretting her departure, for now she would have leisure for Steenie and her books, and now the family would gather itself once more into the perfect sphere to which drop and ocean alike desires to shape itself!

'I thought ye wud be efter me!' cried Steenie, as she opened the door of his burrow, within an hour of his leaving the house.

Now Kirsty had expected to find him full of grief because of Phemy's going, especially as the heartless

girl, for such Steenie's sister could not help thinking her, never said good-bye to her most loving slave. And she did certainly descry on his countenance traces of emotion, and in his eyes the lingering trouble as of a storm all but overblown. There was however in his face the light as of a far sunk aurora, the outmost rim of whose radiance, doubtfully visible, seemed to encircle his whole person. He was not lost in any gloom! She sat down beside him, and waited for him to speak.

Never doubting she would follow him, he had already built up a good peat-fire on the hearth, and placed for her beside it a low settle which his father had made for him, and he had himself covered with a sheepskin of thickest fleece. They sat silent for a while.

'Wud ye say noo, Kirsty, 'at I was ony use til her?' he asked at length.

'Jist a heap,' answered Kirsty. 'I kenna what ever she or I wud hae dune wantin ye! She nott (*needed*) a heap o' luikin til!'

‘And ye think mebbe she’ll be some the better, some w’y or ither, for ’t?’

‘Ay, I div think that, Steenie. But to tell the trowth, I’m no sure she’ll think verra aft aboot what ye did for her!’

‘Ow, na! What for sud she? There’s no need for that! It was for hersel, no for her think-aboot-it, I tried. I was jist fain to du something like wash the feet o’ her. Whan I cam in that day—the day efter ye brought her hame, ye ken—the luik of her puir, bonny, begrutten facy jist turnt my hert ower i’ the mids o’ me. I maist think, gien I hadna been able to du onything for her afore she gaed, I wud hae come hame here to my ain hoose like a deein sheep, and lain doon. Yon face o’ hers comes back til me noo like the face o’ a lost lammie ’at the shepherd didna think worth gaein oot to luik for. But gien I had sic a sair hert for her, the bonny man maun hae had a sairer, and he’ll du for her what he can—and that maun be muckle—muckle! They ca’ ’im the gude shepherd, ye ken!’

He sat silent for some minutes, and Kirsty's heart was too full to let her speak. She could only say to herself—'And folk ca's him half-wuttit, div they! Weel, lat them! Gien he be half-wuttit, the Lord's made up the ither half wi' better!'

'Ay!' resumed Steenie, 'the gude shepherd tynes (*loses*) no ane o' them a'! But I'll miss her dreidfu'! Eh, but I likit to watch the wan bit facy grow and grow till 't was roon' and rosy again! And, eh, sic a bonny reid and white as it was! And better yet I likit to see yon hert-brakin luik o' the lost ane weirin aye awa and awa till 't was clean gane!—And noo she's back til her father, bricht and licht and bonny as the lown starry nicht!—Eh, but it maks me happy to think o' 't!'

'Sae it maks me!' responded Kirsty, feeling, as she regarded him, like a glorified mother beholding her child walking in the truth.

'And noo,' continued Steenie, 'I'm richt glaid she's gane, and my min' 'll be mair at ease gien I tell ye what for:—I maun aye tell you a'thing 'at 'll bide

tellin, Kirsty, ye ken!—Weel, a week or twa ago, I began to be troubled as I never was troubled afore. I canna weel say what was the cause o' 't, or the kin' o' thing it was, but something had come that I didna want to come, and couldna keep awa. Maybe ye'll ken what it was like whan I tell ye 'at I was aye think-thinkin about Phemy. Noo, afore she cam, I was maist aye thinkin about the bonny man; and it wasna that there was ony sic necessity for thinkin about Phemy, for by that time she was oot o' her meesery, whatever that was, or whatever had the wyte (*blame*) o' 't. I' the time afore her, whan my min' wud grow a bit quaiet, and the pooers o' darkness wud draw themsels awa a bit, aye wud come the face o' the bonny man intil the toom place, and fill me fresh up wi' the houp o' seein him or lang; but noo, at ilka moment, up wud come, no the face o' the bonny man, but the face o' Phemy; and I didna like that, and I cudna help it. And a sraichin fear grippit me, 'at I was turnin fause to the bonny man. It wisna that I thought he wud be vext wi' me, but

that I cudna bide onything to come atween me and him. I teuk mysel weel ower the heckles, but I cudna mak oot 'at I cud a'thegither help it. Ye see, somehoo, no bein made a'thegither like ither fowk, I cudna think aboot twa things at ance, and I bude to think aboot the ane that cam o' 'tsel like. But, as I say, it troubled me. Weel, the day, my hert was sair at her gangin awa, for I had been lang used to seein her ilka hoor, maist ilka minute; and the ae wuss i' my hert at the time was to du something worth duin for her, and syne dee and hae dune wi' 't—and there, I doobt, I clean forgot the bonny man! Whan she got intil the doctor's gig and awa they drave, my hert grew cauld; I was like ane deid and beginnin to rot i' the grave. But that minute I h'ard, or it was jist as gien I h'ard—I dinna mean wi' my lugs, but i' my hert, ye ken—a v'ice cry, "Steenie! Steenie!" and I cried lood oot, "Comin, Lord!" but I kent weel eneuch the v'ice was insid o' me, and no i' my heid, but i' my hert—and nane the less i' me for that! Sae awa at ance I cam to my closet here, and sat doon, and

hearkent i' the how o' my hert. Never a word cam, but I grew quaiet—eh, sae quaiet and content like, wi'oot onything to mak me sae, but maybe 'at he was thinkin aboot me! And I'm quaiet yet. And as sune 's it's dark, I s' gang oot and see whether the bonny man be onywhaur aboot. There's naething atween him and me noo; for, the moment I begin to think, it's him 'at comes to be thought aboot, and no Phemy ony mair!

'Steenie,' said Kirsty, 'it was the bonny man sent Phemy til ye—to gie ye something to du for him, luikin efter ane o' his silly lambs.'

'Ay,' returned Steenie; 'I ken she wasna wiselike, sic as you and my mither. She needit a heap o' luikin efter, as ye said.'

'And wi' haein to luik efter her, he kenned that the thoughts that troubled ye wudna sae weel win in, and wud learn to bide oot. Jist luik at ye noo! See hoo ye hae learnt to luik efter yersel! Ye saw it cudna be agreeable to her to hae ye aboot her no that weel washed, and wi' claes ye didna keep tidy

and clean ! Sin' ever ye tuik to luikin efter Phemy, I hae had little trouble luikin efter you !'

'I see't, Kirsty, I see't! I never thought o' the thing afore ! I micht du a heap to mak mysel mair like ither fowk ! I s' no forget, noo 'at I hae gotten a grip o' the thing. Ye'll see, Kirsty !'

'That's my ain Steenie !' answered Kirsty. 'Maybe the bonny man cudna be aye comin to ye himsel, haein ither fowk a heap to luik til, and sae sent Phemy to lat ye ken what he would hae o' ye. Noo 'at ye hae begun, ye'll be growin mair and mair like ither fowk.'

'Eh, but ye fleg me ! I may grow ower like ither fowk ! I maun awa oot, Kirsty ! I'm growin fleyt.'

'What for, Steenie?' cried Kirsty, not a little frightened herself, and laying her hand on his arm. She feared his old trouble was returning in force.

''Cause ither fowk never sees the bonny man, they tell me,' he replied.

'That's their ain wyte,' answered Kirsty. 'They

micht a' see him gien they wud—or at least hear him say they sud see him or lang.'

'Eh, but I'm no sure 'at ever I did see him, Kirsty!'

'That winna haud ye ohn seen him whan the hoor comes. And the like's true o' the lave.'

'Ay, for I canna du wantin him—and sae nouthar can they!'

'Naebody can. A' maun hae seen him, or be gaein to see him.'

'I hae as guid as seen him, Kirsty! He was there! He helpit me whan the ill folk cam to pu' at me!—Ye div think though, Kirsty, 'at I'm b'un' to see him some day?'

'I'm thinkin the hoor's been aye set for that same!' answered Kirsty.

'Kirsty,' returned Steenie, not quite satisfied with her reply, 'I'll gang clean oot the wuts I hae, gien ye tell me I'm never to see him face to face!'

'Steenie,' rejoined Kirsty solemnly, 'I wud gang oot 'o my wuts mysel gien I didna believe that! I believe 't wi' a' my heart, my bonny man.'

‘Weel, and that’s a’ richt! But ye maunna ca’ me yer bonny man, Kirsty; for there’s but ae bonny man, and we ’re a’ brithers and sisters. He said it himsel!’

‘That’s verra true, Steenie; but whiles ye’re sae like him I canna help ca’in ye by his name.’

‘Dinna du’t again, Kirsty. I canna bide it. I’m no bonny! No but I wud sair like to be bonny—bonny like him, Kirsty!—Did ye ever hear tell ’at he had a father? I h’ard a man ance say ’at he hed. Sic a bonny man as that father maun be! Jist think o’ his haein a son like *him*!—Dauvid Barclay maun be richt sair disappointit wi’ sic a son as me—and him sic a man himsel! What for is’t, Kirsty?’

‘That ’ll be ane o’ the secrets the bonny man’s gaein to tell his ain fowk whan he gets them hame wi’ him!’

‘His ain fowk, Kirsty?’

‘Ay, siclike’s you and me. Whan we gang hame, he’ll tell’s a’ aboot a heap o’ things we wad fain ken.’

‘ His ain fowk ! His ain fowk ! ’ Steenie went on for a while murmuring to himself at intervals. At last he said,

‘ What maks them his ain fowk, Kirsty ? ’

‘ What maks me your fowk, Steenie ? ’ she rejoined.

‘ That’s easy to tell ! It’s ’cause we hae the same father and mither ; I hae aye kenned that ! ’ answered Steenie with a laugh.

She had been trying to puzzle him, he thought, but had failed !

‘ Weel, the bonny man and you and me, we hae a’ the same father : that’s what maks us his ain fowk !— Ye see noo ? ’

‘ Ay, I see ! I see ! ’ responded Steenie, and again was silent.

Kirsty thought he had plenty now to meditate upon.

‘ Are ye comin hame wi’ me,’ she asked, ‘ or are ye gaein to bide, Steenie ? ’

‘ I’ll gang hame wi’ ye, gien ye like, but I wud rather bide the nicht,’ he answered. ‘ I’ll hae jist this ae nicht mair oot upo’ the hill, and syne the

morn I'll come hame to the hoose, and see gien I can help my mither, or maybe my father. That's what the bonny man wud like best, I'm sure.'

Kirsty went home with a glad heart : surely Steenie was now in a fair way of becoming, as he phrased it, 'like ither fowk'!

'But the Lord's gowk's better nor the warl's prophet!' she said to herself.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HORN

THE beginning of the winter had been open and warm, and very little snow had fallen. This was much in Phemy's favour, and by the new year she was quite well. But, notwithstanding her heartlessness toward Steenie, she was no longer quite like her old self. She was quieter and less foolish ; she had had a lesson in folly, and a long ministration of love, and knew now a trifle about both. It is true she wrote nearly as much silly poetry, but it was not so silly as before, partly because her imagination had now something of fact to go upon, and poorest fact is better than mere fancy. So free was her heart, however, that she went of herself to see her aunt at

the castle, to whom, having beheld the love between David and his daughter, and begun to feel injured by the little notice her father took of her, she bewailed his indifference.

At Mrs. Bremner's request she had made an appointment to go with her from the castle on a certain Saturday to visit a distant relative, living in a lonely cottage on the other side of the Horn—a woman too old ever to leave her home. When the day arrived, both saw that the weather gave signs of breaking, but the heavy clouds on the horizon seemed no worse than had often shown themselves that winter, and as often passed away. The air was warm, the day bright, the earth dry, and Phemy and her aunt were in good spirits. They had purposed to return early to Weelset, but agreed as they went that Phemy, the days being so short, should take the nearer path to Tiltowie, over the Horn. By this arrangement, their visit ended, they had no great distance to walk together, Mrs. Bremner's way lying along the back of the hill, and Phemy's over the nearer shoulder of it.

As they took leave of each other a little later than they had intended, Mrs. Bremner cast a glance at the gathering clouds, and said,

‘I doobt, lassie, it’s gaein to ding on afore the nicht! I wuss we war hame the twa o’ ’s! Gien it cam on to snaw and blaw baith, we nicht hae ill winnin there!’

‘Noucht’s to fear, auntie,’ returned Phemy. ‘It’s a heap ower warm to snaw. It may rain—I wudna won’er, but there’ll be nae snaw—no afore I win hame, onygait.’

‘Weel, min’, gien there be ae drap o’ weet, ye maun change ilka stie the minute ye’re i’ the hoose. Ye’re no that stoot yet!’

‘I’ll be sure, auntie!’ answered Phemy, and they parted almost at a right angle.

Before Phemy got to the top of the hill-shoulder, which she had to cross by a path no better than a sheep-track, the wind had turned to the north, and was blowing keen, with gathering strength, from the regions of everlasting ice, bringing with it a cold

terrible to be faced by such a slight creature as Phemy; and so rapidly did its force increase that in a few minutes she had to fight for every step she took; so that, when at length she reached the top, which lay bare to the continuous torrent of fierce and fiercer rushes, her strength was already all but exhausted. The wind brought up heavier and heavier snow-clouds, and darkness with them, but before ever the snow began to fall, Phemy was in evil case—in worse case, indeed, than she could know. In a few minutes the tempest had blown all energy out of her, and she sat down where was not a stone to shelter her. When she rose, afraid to sit longer, she could no more see the track through the heather than she could tell without it in which direction to turn. She began to cry, but the wind did not heed her tears; it seemed determined to blow her away. And now came the snow, filling the wind faster and faster, until at length the frightful blasts had in them, perhaps, more bulk of blinding and dizzying snowflakes than of the air which drove them. They threatened between them

to fix her there in a pillar of snow. It would have been terrible indeed for Phemy on that waste hillside, **but** that the cold and the tempest speedily stupefied her.

Kirsty always enjoyed the winter heartily. For one thing, it roused her poetic faculty—oh, how different in its outcome from Phemy's!—far more than the summer. That very afternoon, leaving Steenie with his mother, she paid a visit to the weem, and there, in the heart of the earth, made the following little song, addressed to the sky-soaring lark :—

What gars ye sing sae, birdie,
As gien ye war lord o' the lift?
On breid ye're an unco sma' lairdie,
But in hicht ye've a kingly gift!

A' ye hae to coont yersel rich in,
'S a wee mawn o' glory-motes!
The whilk to the throne ye're aye hitchin
Wi' a lang tow o' sapphire notes!

Ay, yer sang's the sang o' an angel
For a sinfu' thrapple no meet,
Like the pipes til a heavenly braingel
Whaur they dance their herts intil their feet!

But though ye canna behaud, birdie,
Ye needna gar a'thing wheesht!
I'm noucht but a herplin herdie,
But I hae a sang i' my breist!

Len' me yer throat to sing throuw,
Len' me yer wings to gang hie,
And I'll sing ye a sang a laverock to cow,
And for bliss to gar him dee!

Long before she had finished writing it, the world was dark outside. She had heard but little heeded the roaring of the wind over her: when at length she put her head up out of the earth, it seized her by the hair as if it would drag it off. It took her more than an hour to get home.

In the meantime Steenie had been growing restless. Coming wind often affected him so. He had been out with his father, who expected a storm, to see that all was snug about byres and stables, and feed the few sheep in an outhouse; now he had come in, and was wandering about the house, when his mother prevailed on him to sit down by the fireside with her. The clouds had gathered thick, and the afternoon was

very dark, but all was as yet still. He called his dog, and Snootie lay down at his feet, ready for what might come. Steenie sat on a stool, with his head on his mother's knee, and for a while seemed lost in thought. Then, without moving or looking up, he said, as if thinking aloud,—

‘It naun be fine fun up there amang thae cloods afore the flauks begin to spread!’

‘What mean ye by that, Steenie, my man?’ asked his mother.

‘They maun be packit sae close, sae unco close i’ their muckle pocks, like the feathers in a feather-bed! and syne, whan they lat them a’ oot thegither, like haudin the bed i’ their twa han’s by the boddom corners, they maun be smorin thick till they begin to spread!’

‘And wha think ye shaks oot the muckle pocks, Steenie?’

‘I dinna ken. I hae aften thought about it. I dinna think it’s likly to be the angels. It’s mair like wark for the bairnies up yoner at the muckle fern at

hame, whaur ilk ane, to the littlest littlin, kens wha he's aboot, and no ane o' them's like some o' 's doon here, 'at gangs a' day in a dream, and canna ge oorsels waukent oot o' 't. I wud be surer but that I hae thought whiles I saw the muckle angels themselves gaein aboot, throu and throu the ondingin flauchter o' the snaw—no mony o' them, ye ken, but jist whiles ane and whiles anither, throu amo' the cauld feathers gaein aye straught wi' their heids up, walkin comfortable, as gien they war at hame in't. I'm thinkin at sic a time they'll be efter helpin some puir body 'at the snaw's like to be ower muckle for. Eh me! gien I cud but get rid o' my feet, and win up to see!'

'What for yer feet, Steenie? What ails ye aye at yer feet? Feet's gey usefu' kin o' things to cratur, whether gien them in fours or twas!'

'Ay, but mine's sic a weicht! It's them 'at's aye haudin me doon! I wad hae been up and awa lang syne gien it hadna been for them!'

'And what wud hae been comin o' hiz wantin ye, Steenie?'

'Ye wad be duin sae weel wantin me, 'at ye wud e aye wantin to be up and efter me! A body's feet's ae doobt usefu to haud a body steady, and ohn gane slawin aboot, but eh, they're unco cummarsum! But syne they're unco guid tu to haud a body ohn thought owre muckle o' himsel! They're fine heumblin things, a body's feet! But, eh, it'll be fine wantin them!'

'Whaur on earth gat ye sic notions aboot yer feet? Guid kens there's naething amiss wi' yer feet! Nouthar o' ye hes ony rizzon to be ashamit o' yer feet. The fac is, *your* feet's by ordinar sma', Steenie, and can add but unco little to yer weicht!'

'It's a' 'at ye ken, mother!' answered Steenie with a smile. 'But, 'deed, I got my information aboot the feet o' fowk frae naegate i' this warl'! The bonny man himsel sent word aboot them. He tellt the minister 'at tellt me, ance I was at the kirk wi' you, mother—lang, lang syne—twa or three hun'er years, I'm thinkin'. The bonny man tellt his ain fowk first that he was gaein awa in order that they nichtna be

able to do wantin him, and bude to stir themselves and come up efter him. And syne he slippit aff his feet, and gaed awa up intil the air whaur the snaw comes frae. And ever sin syne he comes and gangs as he likes. And efter that he telled the minister to tell hiz 'at we was to lay aside the weicht that sae easy besets us, and rin. Noo by *rin* he maun hae meant *rin up*, for a body's no to rin frae the deevil but resist him; and what is't that hauds onybody frae rinnin up the air but his feet? There!—But he's promised to help me aff wi' my feet some day: think o' that!—Eh, gien I cud but get my feet aff! Eh, gien they wad but stick i' my shune, and gang wi' them whan I pu' them aff! They're naething efter a', ye ken, but the shune o' my sowl!

A gust of wind drove against the house, and sank as suddenly.

‘That'll be ane o' them!’ said Steenie, rising hastily. ‘He'll be wantin me! It's no that aften they want onything o' me ayont the fair words a' God's craturs luik for frae ane anither, but whiles they do want me,

and I'm thinkin they want me the nicht. I maun be aein !'

'Hoots, laddie!' returned his mother, 'what can they be wantin, thae gran' offishers, o' siclike as you? Sit ye doon, and bide till they cry ye plain. I wud ain hae ye safe i' the hoose the nicht !'

'It's a' his hoose, mother! A' theroot's therein to him. He's in's ain hoose a' the time, and I'm jist as safe atween his wa's as atween yours. Didna naebody ever tell ye that, mother? Weel, I ken it to be true! And for wantin sic like as me, gien God never has need o' a midge, what for dis he mak sic a lot o' them?'

'Deed it's true eneuch ye say!' returned his mother. 'But I div won'er ye're no fleyt !'

'Fleyt!' rejoined Steenie; 'what for wud I be fleyt? What is there to be fleyt at? I never was fleyt at face o' man or wuman—na, nor o' beast naither!—I was ance, and never but that ance, fleyt at the face o' a bairn !'

'And what for that, Steenie?'

‘He was rinnin efter his wee sister to lick her, and his face was the face o’ a deevil. He nearhan’ garred me hate him, and that wud hae been a terrible sin. But, eh, puir laddie, he hed a richt fearsome wife to the mither o’ him! I’m thinkin the bonny man maun hae a heap o’ tribble wi’ siclike, be they bairns or mithers!’

‘Eh, but ye’re i’ the richt there, laddie!—Noo hearken to me: ye maunna gang the nicht!’ said his mother anxiously. ‘Gien yer father and Kirsty wad but come in to persuaud ye! I’m clean lost wi’oot them!’

‘For the puir idiot hasna the sense to ken what’s wantit o’ him!’ supplemented Steenie, with a laugh almost merry.

‘Daur ye,’ cried his mother indignantly, ‘mint at sic a word and my bairn thegither? He’s my bonny man!’

‘Na, mother, na! *He’s* the bonny man at wha’s feet I sall ae day sit, clothed and i’ my richt min’. He *is* the bonny man!’

‘Thank the Lord,’ continued his mother, still harping on the outrage of such as called her child an idiot, ‘‘at ye’re no an orphan—at there’s three o’ ’s to tak yer part!’

‘Naeboddy can be an orphan,’ said Steenie, ‘sae lang’s God’s nae deid.’

‘Lord, and they ca’ ye an idiot, div they!’ exclaimed Marion Barclay.—‘Weel, be ye or no, ye’re ane o’ the babes in wha’s mooth he perfecteth praise!’

‘He’ll du that some day, maybe!’ answered Steenie.

‘But! eh, Steenie,’ pursued his mother, ‘ye winna gang the nicht!’

‘Mother,’ he answered, ‘ye dinna ken, nor yet do I, what to mak o’ me—what wits I hae, and what wits I haena; but this ye’ll alloo, that, for onything ye ken, the bonny man may be cryin upon me to gang efter some puir little yowie o’ his, oot her lane i’ the storm the nicht!’

With these words he walked gently from the kitchen, his dog following him.

A terrible blast rushed right into the fire when he

opened the door. But he shut it behind him easily, and his mother comforted herself that she had known him out in worse weather. Kirsty entered a moment after, and when her father came in from the loft he called his workshop, they had their tea, and sat round the fire after it, peacefully talking, a little troubled, but nowise uneasy that their Steenie, the darling of them all, was away on the Horn: he knew every foot of its sides better than the collie who, a moment ago asleep before the fire, was now following at his master's heel.

The wind, which had fallen immediately after the second gust as after the first, now began to blow with gathering force, and it took Steenie much longer than usual to make his way over height and hollow from his father's house to his own. But he was in no hurry, not knowing where he was wanted. I do not think he met any angels as he went, but it was a pleasure to think they might be about somewhere, for they were sorry for his heavy feet, and always greeted him kindly. Not that they ever spoke to him, he

said, but they always made a friendly gesture—nodding a stately head, waving a strong hand, or sending him a waft of cool air as they went by, a waft that would come to him through the fiercest hurricane as well as through the stillest calm.

Before, strong-toiling against the wind, man and dog reached their refuge among the rocks, the snow had begun to fall, and the night seemed solid with blackness. The very flakes might have been black as the snow of hell for any gleam they gave. But they arrived at last, and Steenie, making Snootie go in before him, entered the low door with bent head, and closed it behind them. The dog lay down weary, but Steenie set about lighting the peats ready piled between the great stones of the hearth. The wind howled over the waste hill in multitudinous whirls, and swept like a level cataract over the ghastly bog at its foot, but scarce a puff blew against the door of their burrow.

When his fire was well alight, Steenie seated himself by it on the sheepskin settle, and fell into a reverie.

How long he had sat thus he did not know, when suddenly the wind fell, and with the lull master and dog started together to their feet: was it indeed a cry they had heard, or but a moan between wind and mountain? The dog flew to the door with a whine, and began to sniff and scratch at the crack of the threshold; Steenie, thinking it was still dark, went to get a lantern Kirsty had provided him with, but which he had never yet had occasion to use. The dog ran back to him, and began jumping upon him, indicating thus in the dark recess where he found him that he wanted him to open the door. A moment more and they were in the open universe, in a night all of snow, lighted by the wide swooning gleam of a hidden moon, whose radiance, almost absorbed, came filtering through miles of snow-cloud to reach the world. Nothing but snow was to be seen in heaven or earth, but for the present no more was falling. Steenie set the lighted lantern by the door, and followed Snootie, who went sniffing and snuffing about.

Steenie always regarded inferior animals, and espe-

cially dogs, as a lower sort of angels, with ways of their own, into which it would be time to inquire by and by, when either they could talk or he could bark intelligently and intelligibly—in which it used to annoy him that he had not yet succeeded. It was in part his intense desire to enter into the thoughts of his dog, that used to make him imitate him the most of the day. I think he put his body as nearly into the shape of the dog's as he could, in order thus to aid his mind in feeling as the dog was feeling.

As the dog seemed to have no scent of anything, Steenie, after considering for a moment what he must do, began to walk in a spiral, beginning from the door, with the house for the centre. He had thus got out of the little valley on to the open hill, and the wind had begun to threaten reawaking, when Snootie, who was a little way to one side of him, stopped short, and began scratching like a fury in the snow. Steenie ran to him, and dropped on his knees to help him: he had already got a part of something clear! It was the arm of a woman. So deep was the snow over her, that the

cry he and the dog had heard, could not surely have been uttered by her! He was gently clearing the snow from the head, and the snow-like features were vaguely emerging, when the wind gave a wild howl, the night grew dark again, and in bellowing blackness the death-silent snow was upon them. But in a moment or two more, with Snootie's vigorous aid, he had drawn the body of a slight, delicately formed woman out of its cold, white mould. Somehow, with difficulty, he got it on his back, the only way he could carry it, and staggered away with it toward his house. Thus laden, he might never have found it, near as it was, for he was not very strong, and the ground was very rough as well as a little deep in snow, but they had left such a recent track that the guidance of the dog was sure. The wise creature did not, however, follow the long track, but led pretty straight across the spiral for the hut.

The body grew heavy on poor Steenie's back, and the cold of it came through to his spine. It was so cold that it must be a dead thing, he thought. His

breathing grew very short, compelling him, several times, to stop and rest. His legs became insensible under him, and his feet got heavier and heavier in the snow-filled, entangling, impeding heather.

What if it were Phemy! he thought as he struggled on. Then he would have the beautiful thing all to himself! But this was a dead thing, he feared—only a thing, and no woman at all! Of course it couldn't be Phemy! She was at home, asleep in her father's house! He had always shrunk from death; even a dead mouse he could not touch without a shudder; but this was a woman, and might come alive! It belonged to the bonny man, anyhow, and he would stay out with it all night rather than have it lie there alone in the snow! He would not be afraid of her: he was nearly dead himself, and the dead were not afraid of the dead! She had only put off her shoes! But she might be alive, and he must get her into the house! He would like to put off his feet, but most people would rather keep them on, and he must try to keep hers on for her!

With fast failing energy he reached the door, staggered in, dropped his burden gently on his own soft heather-bed, and fell exhausted.

He lay but a moment, came to himself, rose, and looked at the lovely thing he had laboured to redeem from 'cold obstruction.' It lay just as it had fallen from his back, its face uppermost: it *was* Phemy!

For a moment his blood seemed to stand still; then all the divine senses of the half-witted returned to him. There was no time to be sorrowful over her: he must save the life that might yet be in that frozen form! He had nothing in the house except warmth, but warmth more than aught else was what the cold thing needed! With trembling hands he took off her half-thawed clothes, laid her in the thick blankets of his bed, and covered her with every woollen thing in the hut. Then he made up a large fire, in the hope that some of its heat might find her.

She showed no sign of life. Her eyes were fast shut: those who die of cold only sleep into a deeper sleep. Not a trace of suffering was to be seen on her counte-

nance. Death alone, pure, calm, cold, and sweet, was there. But Steenie had never seen Death, and there was room for him to doubt and hope. He laid one fold of a blanket over the lovely white face, as he had seen a mother do with a sleeping infant, called his dog, made him lie down on her feet, and told him to watch ; then turned away, and went to the door. As he passed the fire, he coughed and grew faint, but recovering himself, picked up his fallen stick, and set out for Corbyknowe and Kirsty. Once more the wind had ceased, but the snow was yet falling.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STORM AGAIN

KIRSTY woke suddenly out of a deep, dreamless sleep. A white face was bending over her—Steenie's—whiter than ever Kirsty had seen it. He was panting, and his eyes were huge. She started up.

‘Come; come!’ was all he was able to say.

‘What’s the metter, Steenie?’ she gasped.

For a quarter of a minute he stood panting, unable to speak.

‘I’m no thinkin onything’s gane wrong,’ he faltered at length with an effort, recovering breath and speech a little. ‘The bonny man——’

He burst into tears and turned his head away. A vision of the white, lovely, motionless thing, whose

hand had fallen from his like a lump of lead, lying alone at the top of the Horn, with the dog on her feet, had overwhelmed him suddenly.

Kirsty was sore distressed. She dreaded the worst when she saw him thus lose the self-restraint hitherto so remarkable in him. She leaned from her bed, threw her arms round him, and drew him to her. He kneeled, laid his head on her bosom, and wept as she had never known him weep.

‘I’ll tak care o’ ye, Steenie, my man!’ she murmured. ‘Fear ye naething.’

It is amazing how much, in the strength of its own divinity, love will dare promise !

‘Ay, Kirsty, I ken ye wull, but it’s no me!’ said Steenie.

Thereupon he gave a brief, lucid account of what had occurred in the night.

‘And noo ’at I hae telt ye,’ he added, ‘it luiks a’ sae strange ’at maybe I hae been but dreamin, efter a’ ! But it maun be true, for that maun hae been what the angels cam cryin upo’ me for. I’m thinkin

they wud hae broucht me straucht til her themsels—they maistly gang aboot in twas, as whan they gaed and waukent the bonny man—gien it hadna been 'at the guid collie was aigual to that !'

Kirsty told him to go and rouse the kitchen fire, and she would be with him in a minute. She sprang out of bed, and dressed as fast as she could, thinking what she had best take with her. 'The puir lassie,' she said to herself, 'may be growin warm, and sleepin deith awa; and by the time we win there she'll be needin something, like the lassie 'at the Lord liftit !' But in her heart she had little hope : it would be a sad day for the schoolmaster.

She went to her father and mother's room, found them awake, and told them Steenie's tale.

'It's time we war up, wuman !' said David.

'Ay,' returned his wife, 'but Kirsty canna bide for 's. Ye maun be aff, lassie ! Tak a wee whusky wi' ye ; but min' it's no that safe wi' frozen fowk. Het milk's the best thing. Tak a drappie o' that wi' ye. I s' be efter ye wi' mair. And dinna forget a piece to

uphaud ye as ye gang; it'll be ill fechtin the win'. Dinna lat Steenie gang back wi' ye; he canna be fit. Sen' him to me, and I'll persuaud him.—Dauvid, man, ye'll hae to saiddle and ride; the doctor maun gang wi' ye straught to Steenie's hoose.'

'Lat me up,' said David, making a motion to free himself of the bedclothes.

Kirsty went, and got some milk to make it hot. But when she reached the kitchen, Steenie was not there, and the fire, which he had tried to wake up, was all but black. The house-door was open, and the snow drifting in. Steenie was gone into the storm again! She hurriedly poured the milk into a small bottle, and thrust it into her bosom to grow warm as she went. Then she lighted a lantern, chiefly that Steenie might catch sight of it, and set out.

She started running, certain, she thought, to overtake him. The wind was up again, but it was almost behind her, and the night was not absolutely dark, for the moon was somewhere. She was far stronger than Steenie, and could walk faster, but, keen as was her

outlook on all sides, for the snow was not falling too thick to let her see a little way through it, she was at length near the top of the Horn without having caught a glimpse of him. Had he dropped on the way? Had she in her haste left him after all in the house? She might have passed him; that was easy to do. One thing she was sure of—he could not have got to his house before her!

As she drew near the door she heard a short howl, and knew it for Sncotie's. Perhaps Phemy had revived! But no! it was a desolate, forsaken cry! The next moment came a glad bark: was it the footstep of Kirsty it greeted, or the soul of Phemy?

With steady hand, and heart prepared, she opened the door and went in. The dog came bounding to her: either he counted himself relieved, or could bear it no longer. He cringed at her feet; he leaped upon her; he saw in her his saviour from the terrible silence and cold and motionlessness. Then he stood still before her, looking up to her, and wagging his tail, but his face said plainly: *It is there!*

Kirsty hesitated a moment ; a weary sense of uselessness had overtaken her, and she shrank from encountering the unchanging and unchangeable ; but she cast off the oppression, and followed the dog to the bedside. He jumped up, and lay down where his master had placed him, as if to say he knew his duty, had been lying there all the time, and had only got up the moment she came. It was the one warm spot in all the woollen pile ; the feet beneath it were cold as the snow outside, and the lovely form lay motionless as a thing that would never move again. Kirsty lifted the blanket : there was Phemy's face, blind with the white death ! It did not look at her, did not recognise her : Phemy was there and not there ! Phemy was far away ! Phemy could not move from where she lay !

Hopeless, Kirsty yet tried her best to wake her from her snow-sleep, shrinking from nothing, except for the despair of it. But long ere she gave up the useless task, she was thinking far more about Steenie than Phemy.

He did not come! 'He must be safe with his mother!' she kept saying in her heart; but she could not reassure herself. The forsaken fire, the open door haunted her. She would succeed for a moment or two in quieting her fears, calling them foolish; the next they would rush upon her like a cataract, and almost overwhelm her. While she was busy with the dead, he might be slowly sinking into the sleep from which she could not wake Phemy!

She laid the cold snow-captive straight, and left her to sleep on. Then, calling the dog, she left the hut, in the hope of meeting her mother, and learning that Steenie was at home.

Now and then, while at her sad task, she had been reminded of the wind by its hollow roaring all about the hill, but not until she opened the door had she any notion how the snow was falling; neither until she left the hollow for the bare hill-side did she realize how the wind was raging. Then indeed the world looked dangerous! If Steenie was out, if her mother had started, they were lost! She would have gone

back into the hut with the dead, but that she might get home in time to prevent her mother from setting out, or might meet her on the way. At the same time the tempest between her and her home looked but a little less terrible to her than a sea breaking on a rocky shore.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW KIRSTY FARED

It was quite dark, and round her swept as it were a whirlpool of snow. The swift flakes struck at her eyes and ears like a swarm of vicious flies. In such a wind, the blows of the soft thin snow, beating upon her face, now from one quarter, now from another, were enough to bewilder even a strong woman like Kirsty. They were like hail to a horse. After trying for a while to force her way, she suddenly became aware of utter ignorance as to the direction in which she was going, and, for the first time in her life, a fell terror possessed her—not for herself, but for Steenie and her father and mother. To herself, Kirsty was nobody, but she belonged to David and Marion

Barclay, and what were they and Steenie to do without her! They would go on looking for her till they too died, and were buried yards deep in the snow!

She kept struggling on, her head bent, and her body leaning forward, forcing herself against, it hardly seemed through, the snow-filled wind—but whither? It was only by the feel of the earth under her feet, that she could tell, and at times she was by no means sure, whether she was going up or down hill. She kept on and on, almost hopeless of getting anywhere, certain of nothing but that, if once she sat down, she would never rise again. Fatigue that must not yield, and the inroads of the cold sleep, at length affected her brain, and her imagination began to take its own way with her. She thought herself condemned to one of those awful dust-towers, for she had read Prideaux, specially devilish invention of the Persians, in which by the constant stirring of the dust so that it filled the air, the lungs of the culprit were at length absolutely choked up. Dead of the dust, she revived to

the snow : it was fearfully white, for it was all dead faces ; she crushed and waded through those that fell, while multitudes came whirling upon her from all sides. Gladly would she have thrown herself down among them, but she must walk, walk on for ever !

All the time, she felt in her dim suffering as if not she but those at home suffered : she had deserted them in trouble, and do what she might she would never get back to them ! She could, she thought, if she but put forth the needful energy, but the last self-exhaustive effort never would come !

Where was the dog ? He had left her ! he was nowhere near her ! She tried to call him, but the storm choked every sound in her very throat. He would never have left her to save himself ! He who makes the dogs must be at least as faithful as they ! So she was not left comfortless !

Then she heard, or thought she heard the church-bell, and that may have had something to do with the strange dream out of which she came gradually to herself.

CHAPTER XXV

KIRSTY'S DREAM

HER dream was this :—

She sat at the communion-table in her own parish-church, with many others, none of whom she knew. A man with piercing eyes went along the table, examining the faces of all to see if they were fit to partake. When he came to Kirsty, he looked at her for a moment sharply, then said, ‘That woman is dead. She has been in the snow all night. Lay her in the vault under the church.’ She rose to go because she was dead, and hands were laid upon her to guide her as she went. They brought her out of the church into the snow and wind, and turned away to leave her. But she remonstrated : ‘The man with the

eyes,' she said, 'gave the order that I should be taken to the vault of the church!'—'Very well,' answered a voice, 'there is the vault! creep into it.' She saw an opening in the ground, at the foot of the wall of the church, and getting down on her hands and knees, crept through it, and with difficulty got into the vault. There all was still. She heard the wind raving, but it sounded afar off. Who had guided her thither? One of Steenie's storm-angels, or the Shepherd of the sheep? It was all one, for the storm-angels were his sheep-dogs! She had been bewildered by the terrible beating of the snow-wind, but her own wandering was another's guiding! Beyond the turmoil of life and unutterably glad, she fell asleep, and the dream left her. In a little while, however, it came again.

She was lying, she thought, on the stone-floor of the church-vault, and wondered whether the examiner, notwithstanding the shining of his eyes, might not have made a mistake: perhaps she was not so very dead! Perhaps she was not quite unfit to eat of the

bread of life after all ! She moved herself a little ; then tried to rise, but failed ; tried again and again, and at last succeeded. All was dark around her, but something seemed present that was known to her—whether man, or woman, or beast, or thing, she could not tell. At last she recognised it ; it was a familiar odour, a peculiar smell, of the kind we call earthy :—it was the air of her own earth-house, in days that seemed far away ! Perhaps she was in it now ! Then her box of matches might be there too ! She felt about and found it. With trembling hands she struck one, and proceeded to light her lamp.

It burned up. Something seized her by the heart.

A little farther in, stretched on the floor, lay a human form on its face. She knew at once that it was Steenie's. The feet were toward her, and between her and them a pair of shoes : he was dead !—he had got rid of his feet !—he was gone after Phemy—gone to the bonny man ! She knelt, and turned the body over. Her heart was like a stone. She raised his head on her arm : it was plain he was dead. A

small stream of blood had flowed from his mouth, and made a little pool, not yet quite frozen. Kirsty's heart seemed about to break from her bosom to go after him ; then the eternal seemed to descend upon her like a waking sleep, a clear consciousness of peace. It was for a moment as if she saw the Father at the heart of the universe, with all his children about his knees : her pain and sorrow and weakness were gone ; she wept glad tears over the brother called so soon from the nursery to the great presence chamber. ' Eh, bonny man ! ' she cried ; ' is 't possible to expec ower muckle frae your father and mine ! '

She sat down beside what was left of Steenie, and ate of the oatcake, and drank of the milk she had carried forgotten until now.

' I won'er what God 'll du wi' the twa ! ' she said to herself. ' Gien *I* lo'ed them baith as I did, *he* lo'es them better ! *I* wud hae dee'd for them ; *he* did ! '

She rose and went out.

Light had come at last, but too dim to be more

than gray. The world was one large white sepulchre in which the earth lay dead. Warmth and hope and spring seemed gone for ever. But God was alive ; his hearth-fire burned ; therefore death was nowhere ! She knew it in her own soul, for the Father was there, and she knew that in his soul were all the loved. The wind had ceased, but the snow was still falling, here and there a flake. A faint blueness filled the air, and was colder than the white. Whether the day was at hand or the night, she could not distinguish. The church bell began to ring, sounding from far away through the silence : what mountains of snow must yet tower unfallen in the heavens, when it was nearly noon, and still so dark ! But Steenie was out of the snow—that was well ! Or perhaps he was beside her in it, only he could leave it when he would ! Surely anyhow Phemy must be with him ! She could not be left all alone and she so silly ! Steenie would have her to teach ! His trouble must have gone the moment he died, but Phemy would have to find out what a goose she was ! She would

be very miserable, and would want Steenie! Kirsty's thoughts cut their own channels: she was as far ahead of her church as the woman of Samaria was ahead of the high priest at Jerusalem.

Thus thinking, thinking, she kept on walking through the snow to weep on her mother's bosom. Suddenly she remembered, and stood still: her mother was going to follow her to Steenie's house! She too must be dead in the snow!—Well, let Heaven take all! They were born to die, and it was her turn now to follow her mother! She started again for home, and at length drew near the house.

It was more like a tomb than a house. The door looked as if no one had gone in there or out for ages. Had she slept in the snow like the seven sleepers in the cave? Were the need and the use of houses and doors long over? Or was she a ghost come to have one look more at her old home in a long dead world? Perhaps her father and mother might have come back with like purpose, and she would see and speak to them! Or was she, alas!

only in a dream, in which the dead would not speak to her? But God was not dead, and while God lived she was not alone even in a dream!

A dark bundle lay on the door-step: it was Snootie. He had been scratching and whining until despair came upon him, and he lay down to die.

She lifted the latch, stepped over the dog, and entered. The peat-fire was smouldering low on the hearth. She sat down and closed her eyes. When she opened them, there lay Snootie, stretched out before the fire! She rose and shut the door, fed and roused the fire, and brought the dog some milk, which he lapped up eagerly.

Not a sound was in the house. She went all over it. Father nor mother was there. It was Sunday, and all the men were away. A cow lowed, and in her heart Kirsty blessed her: she was a live creature! She would go and milk her!

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW DAVID FARED

DAVID BARCLAY got up the moment Kirsty was out of the room, dressed himself in haste, swallowed a glass of whisky, saddled the gray mare, gave her a feed of oats, which she ate the faster that she felt the saddle, and set out for Tiltowie to get the doctor. Threatening as the weather was, he was well on the road before the wind became so full of snow as to cause him any anxiety, either for those on the hill or for himself. But after the first moment of anxiety, a very few minutes convinced him that a battle with the elements was at hand more dangerous than he had ever had to fight with armed men. For some distance the road was safe enough as yet, for the

storm had not had time to heap up the snow between the bordering hills ; but by and by he must come out upon a large track recovered by slow degrees and great labour from the bog, and be exposed to the full force of the now furious wind, where in many places it would be far easier to wander off than to stay upon a road level with the fields, and not even bounded by a ditch the size of a wheel-track. When he reached the open, therefore, he was compelled to go at a footpace through the thick, blinding, bewildering tempest-driven snow ; and was not surprised when, in spite of all his caution, he found, by the sudden sinking and withdrawing of one of his mare's legs with a squelching noise, that he had got astray upon the bog, nor knew any more in what direction the town or other abode of humanity lay. The only thing he did know was the side of the road to which he had turned ; and that he knew only by the ground into which he had got : no step farther must in that direction be attempted. His mare seemed to know this as well as himself, for when she had pulled

her leg out, she drew back a pace, and stood; whereupon David cast a knot on the reins, threw them on her neck, and told her to go where she pleased. She turned half round and started at once, feeling her way at first very carefully. Then she walked slowly on, with her head hanging low. Again and again she stopped and snuffed, diverged a little, and went on.

The wind was packed rather than charged with snow. Men said there never was a wind of the strength with so much snow in it. David began to despair of ever finding the road again, and naturally in such strait thought how much worse would Kirsty and Steenie be faring on the open hill-side. His wife, he knew, could not have started before the storm rose to tempest, and would delay her departure. Then came the reflection, how little at any time could a father do for the well-being of his children! The fact of their being children implied their need of an all-powerful father: must there not then be such a father? Therewith the truth dawned upon him, that first of

truths, which all his church-going and Bible-reading had hitherto failed to disclose, that, for life to be a good thing and worth living, a man must be the child of a perfect father, and know him. In his terrible perturbation about his children, he lifted up his heart—not to the Governor of the world; not to the God of Abraham or Moses; not in the least to the God of the Kirk; least of all to the God of the Shorter Catechism; but to the faithful creator and Father of David Barclay. The aching soul which none but a perfect father could have created capable of deploring its own fatherly imperfection, cried out to the father of fathers on behalf of his children, and as he cried, a peace came stealing over him such as he had never before felt.

Then he knew that his mare had been for some time on hard ground, and was going with purpose in her gentle trot. In five minutes more, he saw the glimmer of a light through the snow. Near as it was, or he could not have seen it, he failed repeatedly in finding his way to it. The mare at length fell over a

stone wall out of sight in the snow, and when they got up they found themselves in a little garden at the end of a farmhouse. Not, however, until the farmer came to the door, wondering who on such a morning could be their visitor, did he know to what farm the mare had brought him. Weary, and well aware that no doctor in his senses would set out for the top of the Horn in such a tempest of black and white, he gratefully accepted the shelter and refreshment of which his mare and he stood by this time in much need, and waited for a lull in the storm.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW MARION FARED

IN the meantime the mother of the family, not herself at the moment in danger, began to suffer the most. It dismayed her to find, when she came down, that Steenie had, as she thought, insisted on accompanying Kirsty, but it was without any great anxiety that she set about preparing food with which to follow them.

She was bending over her fire, busy with her cooking, when all at once the wind came rushing straight down the chimney, blew sleet into the kitchen, blew soot into the pot, and nearly put out the fire. It was but a small whirlwind, however, and presently passed.

She went to the door, opened it a little way, and peeped out: the morning was a chaos of blackness and snow and wind. She had been born and brought up in a yet wilder region, but the storm threatened to be such as in her experience was unparalleled.

‘God preserve ’s!’ cried the poor woman, ‘can this be the en’ o’ a’thing? Is the earth turnin intil a muckle snaw-wreath, ’at whan a’ are deid, there may be nae miss o’ fowk to beery them? Eh, sic a sepulchrin! Mortal wuman cudna carry a basket in sic a leevin snaw-drift! Losh, she wudna carry hersel far! I maun bide a bit gien I wad be ony succour till them! It’s my basket they’ll be wantin’, no me; and i’ this drift, basket may flee but it winna float!’

She turned to her cooking as if it were the one thing to save the world. Let her be prepared for the best as well as for the worst! Kirsty might find Phemy past helping, and bring Steenie home! Then there was David, at that moment fighting for his life, perhaps!—if he came home now, or any of the three, she must be ready to save their lives! they must not

perish on her hands. So she prepared for the possible future, not by brooding on it, but by doing the work of the present. She cooked and cooked, until there was nothing more to be done in that way, and then, having thus cleared the way for it, sat down and cried. There was a time for tears : the Bible said there was ! and when Marion's hands fell into her lap, their hour—and not till then, was come. To go out after Kirsty would have been the bare foolishness of suicide, would have been to abandon her husband and children against the hour of their coming need : one of the hardest demands on the obedience of faith is—to do nothing ; it is often so much easier to do foolishly !

But she did not weep long. A moment more and she was up and at work again, hanging a great kettle of water on the crook, and blowing up the fire, that she might have hot bottles to lay in every bed. Then she assailed the peat-stack in spite of the wind, making to it journey after journey, until she had heaped a great pile of peats in the corner nearest the hearth.

The morning wore on ; the storm continued raging ;

no news came from the white world ; mankind had vanished in the whirling snow. It was well the men had gone home, she thought : there would only have been the more in danger, the more to be fearful about, for all would have been abroad in the drift, hopelessly looking for one another ! But oh Steenie, Steenie ! and her ain Kirsty !

About half-past ten o'clock the wind began to abate its violence, and speedily sank to a calm, wherewith the snow lost its main terror. She looked out ; it was falling in straight, silent lines, flickering slowly down, but very thick. She could find her way now ! Hideous fears assailed her, but she banished them imperiously : they should not sap the energy whose every jot would be wanted ! She caught up the bottle of hot milk she had kept ready, wrapped it in flannel, tied it, with a loaf of bread, in a shawl about her waist, made up the fire, closed the door, and set out for Steenie's house on the Horn.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HUSBAND AND WIFE

Two hours or so earlier, David, perceiving some assuagement in the storm, and his host having offered to go at once to the doctor and the schoolmaster, had taken his mare, and mounted to go home. He met with no impediment now except the depth of the snow, which made it so hard for the mare to get along that, full of anxiety about his children, he found the distance a weary one to traverse.

When at length he reached the Knowe, no one was there to welcome him. He saw, however, by the fire and the food, that Marion was not long gone. He put up the gray, clothed her and fed her, drank some milk, caught up a quarter of cakes, and started for the hill.

The snow was not falling so thickly now, but it had already almost obliterated the footprints of his wife. Still he could distinguish them in places, and with some difficulty succeeded in following their track until it was clear which route she had taken. They indicated the easier, though longer way—not that by the earth-house, and the father and daughter passed without seeing each other. When Kirsty got to the farm, her father was following her mother up the hill.

When David reached the Hillfauld, the name he always gave Steenie's house, he found the door open, and walked in. His wife did not hear him, for his iron-shod shoes were balled with snow. She was standing over the body of Phemy, looking down on the white sleep with a solemn, motherly, tearless face. She turned as he drew near, and the pair, like the lovers they were, fell each in the other's arms. Marion was the first to speak.

‘Eh Dauvid! God be praised I hae yersel!’

‘Is the puir thing gane?’ asked her husband in an

awe-hushed tone, looking down on the maid that was not dead but sleeping.

‘I doobt there’s no doobt about that,’ answered Marion. ‘Steenie, I was jist thinkin, wud be sair disapp’intit to learn ’at there was. Eh, the faith o’ that laddie! H’aven to him’s sic a rare place, and sic a hantle better nor this warl, ’at he wad not only fain be there himsel, but wad hae Phemy there—ay, gien it war ever sae lang afore himsel! Ye see he kens naething about sin and the saicrifeece, and he disna un’erstan ’at Phemy was aye a gey wull kin’ o’ a lassie!’

‘Maybe the bonny man, as Steenie ca’s him,’ returned David, ‘may hae as muckle compassion for the puir thing i’ the hert o’ ’im as Steenie himsel!’

‘Ow ay! Whatfor no! But what can the bonny man himsel du, a’ bein sattlet?’

‘Dinna leemit the Almichty, wuman—and that i’ the verra moment whan he’s been to hiz—I wunna say mair gracious nor ord’nar, for that cudna be—but whan he’s latten us see a bit plainer nor common that

he *is* gracious! The Lord o' mercy 'ill manage to luik efter the lamnie he made, ae w'y or ither, there as here. Ye daurna say he didna du his best for her here, and wull he no du his best for her there as weel?

'Doobtless, Dauvid! But ye fricht me! It souns jist rank papistry—naither mair nor less! What *can* he du? He canna dee again for ane 'at wudna turn til 'im i' this life! The thing's no to be thought!'

'Hoo ken ye that, wuman? Ye hae jist thought it yersel! Gien I was you, I wudna daur to say what he cudna du! I' the meantime, what he maks me able to houp, I'm no gaein to fling frae me!'

David was a true man: he could not believe a thing with one half of his mind, and care nothing about it with the other. He, like his Steenie, believed in the bonny man about in the world, not in the mere image of him standing in the precious shrine of the New Testament.

After a brief silence—

'Whaur's Kirsty and Steenie?' he said.

‘The Lord kens ; I dinna.’

‘They’ll be safe eneuch.’

‘It’s no likly.’

‘It’s sartin,’ said David.

And therewith, by the side of the dead, he imparted to his wife the thoughts that drove misery from his heart as he sat on his mare in the storm with the reins on her neck, nor knew whither she went.

‘Ay, ay,’ returned his wife after a pause, ‘ye’re unco richt, Dauvid, as aye ye are ! And I’m jist conscience-tricken to think ‘at a’ my life lang I hae been ready to murn ower the sorrow i’ *my* hert, never thinkin o’ the glaidness i’ God’s ! What call hed I to greit ower Steenie, whan God maun hae been aye sair pleased wi’ him ! What sense is there in lamentation sae lang’s God’s eident settin richt a’ ! His hert’s the safity o’ oors. And eh, glaid sure he maun be, wi sic a lot o’ his bairns at hame aboot him !’

‘Ay,’ returned David with a sigh, thinking of his old comrade and the son he had left behind him, ‘but here’s the prodigal anes !’

‘Thank God, we hae nae prodigal!’

‘Aye, thank him!’ rejoined David; ‘but *he* has prodigals that trouble him sair, and we maun see til’t ‘at we binna thankless auld prodigals oorsels!’

Again followed a brief silence.

‘Eh, but isna it strange?’ said Marion. ‘Here’s you and me stanin murnin ower anither man’s bairn, and naewise kennin what’s come o’ oor ain twa!—Dauvid, what *can* hae come o’ Steenie and Kirsty?’

‘The wull o’ God’s what’s come o’ them; and God haud me i’ the grace o’ wussin naething ither nor that same!’

‘Haud to that, Dauvid, and haud me till’t: we kenna what’s comin!’

‘The wull o’ God’s comin,’ insisted David. ‘But eh,’ he added, ‘I’m concernt for puir Maister Craig!’

‘Weel, lat’s awa hame and see whether the twa bena there afore’s!—Eh, but the sicht o’ the bonny corp maun hae gien Steenie a sair hert! I wudna won’er gien he never wan ower’t i’ this life!’

‘But what’ll we du aboot it or we gang? It’s the

storm may come on again waur nor ever, and mak it impossible to beery her for a month !'

'We cudna carry her hame atween's, Dauvid—think ye ?'

'Na, na ; it's no as gien it was hersel ! And cauld's a fine keeper—better nor a' the embalmin o' the Egyptians ! Only I'm fain to haud Steenie ohn seen her again !'

'Weel, lat's hap her i' the bonny white snaw !' said Marion. 'She'll keep there as lang as the snaw keeps, and naething 'ill disturb her till the time comes to lay her awa !'

'That's weel thought o' !' answered David. 'Eh, wuman, but it's a bonny beerial compared wi' sic as I hae aften gien comrade and foe alike !'

They went out and chose a spot close by the house where the snow lay deep. There they made a hollow, and pressed the bottom of it down hard. Then they carried out and laid in it the death-frozen dove, and heaped upon her a firm, white, marble-like tomb of heavenly new-fallen snow.

Without re-entering it, they closed the door of Steenie's refuge, and leaving the two deserted houses side by side, made what slow haste they could, with anxious hearts, to their home. The snow was falling softly, for the wind was still asleep.

CHAPTER XXIX

DAVID, MARION, KIRSTY, SNOOTIE, AND WHAT WAS LEFT
OF STEENIE

KIRSTY saw their shadows darken the wall, and turning from her work at the dresser, ran to the door to meet them.

‘God be thankit!’ cried David.

Marion gave her daughter one loving look, and entering cast a fearful, questioning glance around the kitchen.

‘Whaur’s Steenie?’ she said.

‘He’s wi’ Phemy, I’m thinkin,’ faltered Kirsty.

‘Lassie, are ye dementit?’ her mother almost screamed. ‘We’re this minute come frae there!’

‘He *is* wi’ Phemy, mother. The Lord canna

surely hae pairtit them, gangin in maist haudin hans !'

'Kirsty, I haud ye accoontable for my Steenie !' cried Marion, sinking on a chair, and covering her face with her hands.

'It's the wull o' God 'at's accoontable for him, wuman !' answered David, sitting down beside her, and laying hold of her arm.

She burst into terrible weeping.

'He maun be sair at hame wi' the bonny man !' said Kirsty.

'Lassie,' said David, 'you and me and yer mither, we hae naething left but be better bairns, and gang the fester to the bonny man !—Whaur's what's left o' the laddie, Kirsty ?'

'Lyin i' my hoose, as he ca'd it. Mine was i' the yerd, his i' the air, he said. He was awa afore I wan to the kitchen. He had jist killt himsel savin at Phemy, rinnin and fechtin on, upo' the barest chance o' savin her life ; and sae whan he set off again to gang til her, no bidin for me, he was that forfouchten

'at he hed a bluid-brak in 's breist, and was jist able, and nae mair, to creep intil the weem oot o' the snaw. He didna like the place, and yet had a kin' o' a notion o' the bonny man bein there whiles. I'm thinkin Snootie maun hae won til him, and run hame for help, for I faund him maist deid upo' the door-step.'

David stooped and patted the dog.

'Na, that cudna be,' he said, 'or he wud never hae left him, I'm thinkin.—Ye're a braw dog,' he went on to the collie, 'and I'm thankfu' yer no lyin wi yer tongue oot!—But guid comes to guid doggies!' he added, fondling the creature, who had risen, and feebly set his paws on his knee.

'And ye left him lyin there! Hoo hed ye the hert, Kirsty?' sobbed the mother reproachfully.

'Mother, he was better aff nor ony ither ane o' 's! I winna say, mother, 'at I lo'ed him sae weel as ye lo'ed him, for maybe that wudna be natur—I dinna ken; and I daurna say 'at I lo'e him as the bonny man lo'es his brithers and sisters a'; but I hae yet to learn hoo to lo'e him better. Onygait, the bonny man

wantit him, and he has him! And whan I left him there, it was jist as gien I hield him oot i' my airms and said, "Hae, Lord; tak him: he's yer ain!"'

'Ye're i' the richt, Kirsty, my bonny bairn!' said David. 'Yer mither and me, we was never but pleased wi' onything 'at ever ye did.—Isna that true, Mar'on, my ain wuman?'

'True as his word!' answered the mother, and rose, and went to her room.

David sought the yard, saw that all was right with the beasts, and fed them. Thence he made his way to his workshop over the cart-shed, where in five minutes he constructed, with two poles run through two sacks, a very good stretcher, carrying it to the kitchen, where Kirsty sat motionless, looking into the fire.

'Kirsty,' he said, 'ye're 'maist as strong's a man, and I wudna wullinly ony but oor ain three sels laid finger upo' what's left o' Steenie: are ye up to takin the feet o' 'im to fess him hame? Here's what'll mak it 'maist easy!'

Kirsty rose at once.

‘A drappy o’ milk, and I’m ready,’ she answered.

‘Wull ye no tak a moofu’ o’ whusky yersel, father?’

‘Na, na; I want naething,’ replied David.

He had not yet learned what Kirsty went through the night before, when he asked her to help him carry the body of her brother home through the snow. Kirsty, however, knew no reason why she should not be as able as her father.

He took the stretcher, and they set out, saying nothing to the mother: she was still in her own room, and they hoped she might fall asleep.

‘It min’s me o’ the women gauin til the sepulchre!’ said David. ‘Eh, but it maun hae been a sair time til them!—a heap sairer nor this hert-brak here!’

‘Ye see they didna ken ’at he wasna deid,’ assented Kirsty, ‘and we div ken ’at Steenie’s no deid! He’s maybe walkin about wi the bonny man—or maybe jist ristin himsel a wee efter the uprisin! Jist think o’ his heid bein a’ richt, and his een as clear as the bonny man’s ain! Eh, but Steenie maun be in grit glee!’

Thus talking as they went, they reached and entered

the earth-house. They found no angels on guard, for Steenie had not to get up again.

David wept the few tears of an old man over the son who had been of no use in the world but the best use—to love and be loved. Then, one at the head and the other at the feet, they brought the body out, and laid it on the bier.

Kirsty went in again, and took Steenie's shoes, tying them in her apron.

'His feet's no sic a weicht noo!' she said, as together they carried their burden home.

The mother met them at the door.

'Eh!' she cried, 'I thought the Lord had taen ye baith, and left me my lane 'cause I was sae hard-hertit til him! But noo 'at he 's broucht ye back—and Steenie, what there is o' him, puir bairn!—I s' never say anither word, but jist lat him du as he likes.—There, Lord, I hae dune! Pardon thoo me wha canst.'

They carried the forsaken thing up the stair, and laid it on Kirsty's bed, looking so like and so unlike Steenie asleep. Marion was so exhausted, both mind

and body, that her husband insisted on her postponing all further ministration till the morning ; but at night Kirsty unclothed the untenanted, and put on it a long white nightgown. When the mother saw it lying thus she smiled, and wept no more ; she knew that the bonny man had taken home his idiot.

CHAPTER XXX

FROM SNOW TO FIRE

My narrative must now go a little way back in time, and a long way from the region of heather and snow, to India in the year of the mutiny. The regiment in which Francis Gordon served, his father's old regiment, had lain for months besieged in a well known city by the native troops, and had begun to know what privation meant, its suffering aggravated by that of not a few women and children. With the other portions of the Company's army there shut up, it had behaved admirably. Danger and sickness, wounds and fatigue, hunger and death, had brought out the best that was in the worst of them: when their country knew how they had fought and endured, she

was proud of them. Had their enemies, however, been naked Zulus, they would have taken the place within a week.

Francis Gordon had done his part, and well.

It would be difficult to analyze the effect of the punishment Kirsty had given him, but its influence was upon him through the whole of the terrible time—none the less beneficent that his response to her stinging blows was indignant rage. I dare hardly speculate what, had she not defended herself so that he could not reach her, he might not have done in the first instinctive motions of natural fury. It is possible that only Kirsty's skill and courage saved him from what he would never have surmounted the shame of—taking revenge on a woman avenging a woman's wrong: from having deserved to be struck by a woman, nothing but repentant shame could save him.

When he came to himself, the first bitterness of the thing over, he could not avoid the conviction, that the playmate of his childhood, whom once he loved best in the world, and who when a girl refused to marry him,

had come to despise him, and that righteously. The idea took a firm hold on him, and became his most frequently recurrent thought. The wale of Kirsty's whip served to recall it a good many nights; and long after that had ceased either to smart or show, the thought would return of itself in the night-watches, and was certain to come when he had done anything his conscience called wrong, or his judgment foolish.

The officers of his mess were mostly men of character with ideas better at least than ordinary as to what became a man; and their influence on one by no means of a low, though of an unstable nature, was elevating. It is true that a change into a regiment of jolly, good-mannered, unprincipled men would within a month have brought him to do as they did; and in another month would have quite silenced, for a time at least, his poor little conscience; but he was at present rising. Events had been in his favour; after reaching India, he had no time to be idle; the mutiny broke out, he must bestir himself, and, as I have said, the best in him was called to the front.

He was specially capable of action with show in it. Let eyes be bent upon him, and he would go far. The presence of his kind to see and laud was an inspiration to him. Left to act for himself, undirected and unseen, his courage would not have proved of the highest order. Throughout the siege, nevertheless, he was noted for a daring that often left the bounds of prudence far behind. More than once he was wounded—once seriously; but even then he was in four days again at his post. His genial manners, friendly carriage, and gay endurance rendered him a favourite with all.

The sufferings of the besieged at length grew such, and there was so little likelihood of the approaching army being able for some time to relieve the place, that orders were issued by the commander-in-chief to abandon it: every British person must be out of the city before the night of the day following. The general in charge thereupon resolved to take advantage of the very bad watch kept by the enemy, and steal away in silence the same night.

The order was given to the companies, to each man individually, to prepare for the perilous attempt, but to keep it absolutely secret save from those who were to accompany them ; and so cautious was the little English colony as well as the garrison, that not a rumour of the intended evacuation reached the besiegers, while, throughout the lines and in the cantonments, it was thoroughly understood that, at a certain hour of the night, without call of bugle or beat of drum, everyone should be ready to march. Ten minutes after that hour the garrison was in motion. With difficulty, yet with sufficing silence, the gates were passed, and the abandonment effected.

The first shot of the enemy's morning salutation, earlier than usual, went tearing through a bungalow within whose shattered walls lay Francis Gordon. In a dining-room, whose balcony and window-frame had been smashed the day before, he still slumbered wearily, when close past his head rushed the eighteen-pounder with its infernal scream. He started up, to find the blood flowing from a splinter wound on his

temple and cheek-bone. A second shot struck the foot of his long chair. He sprang from it, and hurried into his coat and waistcoat.

But how was all so still inside? Not one gun answered! Firing at such an hour, he thought, the rebels must have got wind of their intended evacuation. It was too late for that, but why did not the garrison reply? Between the shots he seemed to *hear* the universal silence. Heavens! were their guns already spiked? If so, all was lost!—But it was daylight! He had overslept himself! He ought to have been with his men—how long ago he could not tell, for the first shot had taken his watch. A third came and broke his sword, carrying the hilt of it through the wall on which it hung. Not a sound, not a murmur reached him from the fortifications. Could the garrison be gone? Was the hour past? Had no one missed him? Certainly no one had called him! He rushed into the compound. Not a creature was there! He was alone—one English officer amid a revolted army of hating Indians!

But they did not yet know that their prey had slid from their grasp, for they were going on with their usual gun-reveillé, instead of rushing on flank and rear of the retreating column! He might yet elude them and overtake the garrison! Half-dazed, he hurried for the gate by which they were to leave the city. Not a live thing save two starved dogs did he meet on his way. One of them ran from him; the other would have followed him, but a ball struck the ground between them, raising a cloud of dust, and he saw no more of the dog.

He found the gate open, and not one of the enemy in sight. Tokens of the retreat were plentiful, making the track he had to follow plain enough.

But now an enemy he had never encountered before—a sense of loneliness and desertion and helplessness, rising to utter desolation, all at once assailed him. He had never in his life congratulated himself on being alone—not that he loved his neighbour, but that he loved his neighbour's company, making him less aware of an uneasy self. And now first he realized

that he had seen his sword-hilt go off with a round shot, and had not caught up his revolver—that he was, in fact, absolutely unarmed.

He quickened his pace to overtake his comrades. On and on he trudged through nothing but rice-fields, the day growing hotter and hotter, and his sense of desolation increasing. Two or three natives passed him, who looked at him, he thought, with sinister eyes.

He had eaten no breakfast, and was not likely to have any lunch. He grew sick and faint, but there was no refuge : he must walk, walk until he fell and could walk no more ! With the heat and his exertion, his hardly healed wound began to assert itself ; and by and by he felt so ill, that he turned off the road, and lay down. While he lay, the eyes of his mind began to open to the fact that the courage he had hitherto been so eager to show, could hardly have been of the right sort, seeing it was gone—evaporated clean.

He rose and resumed his walk, but at every smallest

sound started in fear of a lurking foe. With vainest regret he remembered the long-bladed dagger-knife he had when a boy carried always in his pocket. It was exhaustion and illness, true, that destroyed his courage, but not the less was he a man of fear, not the less he felt himself a coward. Again he got into a damp brake and lay down, in a minute or two again got up and went on, his fear growing until, mainly through consciousness of itself, it ripened into abject terror. Loneliness seemed to have taken the shape of a watching omnipresent enemy, out of whose diffusion death might at any moment break in some hideous form.

It was getting toward night when at length he saw dust ahead of him, and soon after, he descried the straggling rear of the retreating English. Before he reached it a portion had halted for a little rest, and he was glad to lie down in a rough cart.

Long before the morning the cart was on its way again, Gordon in it, raving with fever, and unable to tell who he was. He was soon in friendly

shelter, however, under skilful treatment, and tenderly nursed.

When at length he seemed to have almost recovered his health, it was clear that he had in great measure lost his reason.

CHAPTER XXXI

KIRSTY SHOWS RESENTMENT

THINGS were going from bad to worse at castle Weelset. Whether Mrs. Gordon had disgusted her friends or got tired of them, I do not know, but she remained at home, seldom had a visitor, and never a guest. Rumour, busy in country as in town, said she was more and more manifesting herself a slave to strong drink. She was so tired of herself, that, to escape her double, she made it increasingly a bore to her. She never read a book, never had a newspaper sent her, never inquired how things were going on about the place or in any part of the world, did nothing for herself or others, only ate, drank, slept, and raged at those around her.

One morning David Barclay, having occasion to see the factor, went to the castle, and finding he was at home ill, thought he would make an attempt to see Mrs. Gordon, and offer what service he could render : she might not have forgotten that in old days he had been a good deal about the estate. She received him at once, but behaved in such extraordinary fashion that he could not have any doubt she was at least half-drunk : there was no sense, David said, either to be got out of her, or put into her.

At Corbyknowe they heard nothing of the young laird. The papers said a good deal about the state of things in India, but Francis Gordon was not mentioned.

In the autumn of the year 1858, when the days were growing short and the nights cold in the high region about the Horn, the son of a neighbouring farmer, who had long desired to know Kirsty better, called at Corbyknowe with his sister, ostensibly on business with David. They were shown into the parlour, and all were sitting together in the early

gloamin, the young woman bent on persuading Kirsty to pay them a visit and see the improvements they had made in house and garden, and the two farmers lamenting the affairs of the property on which they were tenants.

‘But I hear there’s new grief like to come to the auld lairdship,’ said William Lammie, as he sat with an elbow on the tea-table whence Kirsty was removing the crumbs.

‘And what may the wisdom o’ the country-side be puttin furth the noo?’ asked David in a tone of good-humoured irony.

‘Weel, as I hear, Mistress Comrie’s been to Embro’ for a week or twa, and’s come hame wi’ a gey queer story concernin the young laird—awa oot there whaur there’s been sic a rumpus wi’ the h’athen so’diers. There’s word come, she says, ’at he’s fa’en intil the verra glaur o’ disgrace, funkin at something they set him til: na, he wudna! And they hed him afore a coort-mairtial as they ca’ ’t, and broucht it in, she says, bare cooardice, and jist broke him. He’ll hae

ill shawin the face o' 'm again i' 's ain calf-country !'

'It's a lee,' said Kirsty. 'I s' tak my aith o' that, whaever took the tellin o' 't. There never was mark o' cooard upo' Francie Gordon. He hed his fauts, but no ane o' them luikit that gait. He was a kin' o' saft-like whiles, and unco easy come ower, but, haein little fear mysel, I ken a cooard whan I see him. Something may hae set up his pride—he has eneuch o' that for twa deevils—but Francie was never nae cooard !'

'Dinna lay the lee at my door, I beg o' ye, Miss Barclay. I was but tellin ye what fowk was saying.'

'Fowk's aye sayin, and seldom sayin true. The warst o' 't is 'at honest fowk's aye ready to believe leears ! They dinna lee themsel's, and sae it's no easy to them to think anither wad. Thereby the fause word has free coorse and is glorifeed ! They're no a' leears 'at spreads the lee ; but for them 'at maks the lee, the Lord silence them !'

‘Hoots, Kirsty,’ said her mother, ‘it disna become ye to curse naebody! It’s no richt o’ ye.’

‘It’s a guid Bible-curse, mother! It’s but a w’y o’ sayin “His wull be dune!”’

‘Ye needna be sae fell aboot the laird, Miss Barclay! He was nae partic’lar frien o’ yours gien a’ tales be true!’ remarked her admirer.

‘I’m tellin ye tales is maistly lees. I hae kenned the laird sin’ he was a wee laddie—and afore that; and I’m no gaein to hear him leed upo’ and haud my tongue! A lee’s a lee whether the leear be a leear or no!—I hae dune.’

She did not speak another word to him save to bid him good-night.

In the beginning of the year, a rumour went about the country that the laird had been seen at the castle, but it died away.

David pondered, but asked no questions, and Mrs. Bremner volunteered no information.

Kirsty of course heard the rumour, but she never took much interest in the goings on at the castle.

Mrs. Gordon's doings were not such as the angels desire to look into; and Kirsty, not distantly related to them, and inheriting a good many of their peculiarities, minded her own business.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE WORKSHOP

ONE night in the month of January, when the snow was falling thick, but the air, because of the cloud-blankets overhead, was not piercing, Kirsty went out to the workshop to tell her father that supper was ready. David was a Jack-of-all-trades—therein resembling a sailor rather than a soldier, and by the light of a single dip was busy with some bit of carpenter's work.

He did not raise his head when she entered, and heard her as if he did not hear. She wondered a little and waited. After a few moments of silence, he said quietly, without looking up—

‘Are ye awaur o’ onything by ord’nar, Kirsty?’

‘Na, naething, father,’ answered Kirsty, wondering still.

‘It’s been beirin ’tsel in upo’ me at my bench here, ’at Steenie’s aboot the place the nicht. I canna help imaignin he’s been upo’ this verra flure ower and ower again sin’ I cam oot, as gien he wad fain say something, but cudna, and gaed awa again.’

‘Think ye he’s here at this moment, father?’

‘Na, he’s no.’

‘He used to think whiles the bonny man was aboot!’ said Kirsty reflectively.

‘My mother was a hielan wuman, and hed the second sicht; there was no mainner o’ doobt aboot it!’ remarked David, also thoughtfully.

‘And what wad ye draw frae that, father?’ asked Kirsty.

‘Ow, naething verra important, maybe, but just ’at possibly it micht be i’ the faimily!’

‘I wud like to ken yer verra thoucht, father!’

‘Weel, it’s jist this: I’m thinkin ’at some may be nearer the deid nor ithers.’

‘And, maybe,’ supplemented Kirsty, ‘some o’ the deid may win nearer the livin nor ithers!’

‘Ay, that’s it! that’s the hail o’ ’t!’ answered David.

Kirsty turned her face toward the farthest corner. The place was rather large, and everywhere dark except within the narrow circle of the candle-light. In a quiet voice, with a little quaver in it, she said aloud:

‘Gien ye be here, Steenie, and hae the pooer, lat’s ken gien there be onything lyin til oor han’ ’at ye wuss dune. I’m sure, gien there be, it’s for oor sakes and no for yer ain, glaid as we wud a’ be to du onything for ye: the bonny man lats ye want for nae-thing; we’re sure o’ that!’

‘Ay are we, Steenie,’ assented his father.

No voice came from the darkness. They stood silent for a while. Then David said:

‘Gang in, lassie; yer mother ’ll be won’erin what’s come o’ ye. I’ll be in in a meenit. I hae jist the last stroke to gie this bit jobby.’

CHAPTER XXXIII

A RACE WITH DEATH

WITHOUT a word, but with disappointment in her heart that Steenie had not answered them, Kirsty obeyed. But she went round through the rickyard that she might have a moment's thought with herself. Not a hand was laid upon her out of the darkness, no faintest sound came to her ears through the silently falling snow. But as she took her way between two ricks, where was just room for her to pass, she felt—felt, however, without the slightest sense of *material* opposition, that she could not go through. Endeavouring afterward to describe what rather she was aware of than felt, she said the nearest she could come to it, but it was not right, was to say

that she seemed to encounter the ghost of solidity. Certainly nothing seemed to touch her. She made no attempt to overcome the resistance, and the moment she turned, knew herself free to move in any other direction. But as the house was still her goal, she tried another space between two of the ricks. There again she found she could not pass. Making a third essay in yet another interval, she was once more stopped in like fashion. With that came the conviction that she was wanted elsewhere, and with it the thought of the Horn. She turned her face from the house and made straight for the hill, only that she took, as she had generally done with Steenie, the easier and rather longer way.

The notion of the presence of Steenie, which had been with her all the time, naturally suggested his house as the spot where she was wanted, and thither she sped. But the moment she reached, almost before she entered it, she felt as if it were utterly empty—as if it had not in it even air enough to give her breath.

When a place seems to repel us, when we feel as

if we could not live there, what if the cause be that there are no souls in it making it comfortable to the spiritual sense? That the *knowledge* of such presence would make most people uneasy, is no argument against the fancy: truth itself, its intrinsic, essential, necessary trueness unrecognised, must be repellent.

Kirsty did not remain a moment in Steenie's house, but set her face to go home by the shorter and rougher path leading over the earth-house and across the little burn.

The night continued dark, with an occasional thinning of the obscurity when some high current blew the clouds aside from a little nest of stars. Just as Kirsty reached the descent to the burn, the snow ceased, the clouds parted, and a faint worn moon appeared. She looked just like a little old lady too thin and too tired to go on living more than a night longer. But her waning life was yet potent over Kirsty, and her strange, wasted beauty, dying to rise again, made her glad as she went down the hill through the snow-crowned heather. The oppression

which came on her in Steenie's house was gone entirely, and in the face of the pale ancient moon her heart grew so light that she broke into a silly song which, while they were yet children, she made for Steenie, who was never tired of listening to it :

Willy, wally, woo!
Hame comes the coo—
Hummle, hummle, moo!—
Widin ower the Bogie,
Hame to fill the cogie!
Bonny hummle coo,
Wi' her baggy fu'
O' butter and o' milk,
And cream as saft as silk,
A' gethered frae the gerse
Intil her tassly purse,
To be oors, no hers,
Gudewillie, hummle coo!
Willy, wally, woo!
Moo, Hummlie, moo!

Singing this childish rime, dear to the slow-waking soul of Steenie, she had come almost to the bottom of the hill, was just stepping over the top of the weem, when something like a groan startled her. She stopped and sent a keen-searching glance around.

It came again, muffled and dull. It must be from the earth-house! Somebody was there! It could not be Steenie, for why should Steenie groan? But he might be calling her, and the weem changing the character of the sound! Anyhow she must be wanted! She dived in.

She could scarcely light the candle, for the trembling of her hand and the beating of her heart. Slowly the flame grew, and the glimmer began to spread. She stood speechless, and stared. Out of the darkness at her feet grew the form, as it seemed, of Steenie, lying on his face, just as when she found him there a year before. She dropped on her knees beside him.

He was alive at least, for he moved! 'Of course,' thought Kirsty, 'he's alive: he never was anything else!' His face was turned from her, and his arm was under it. The arm next her lay out on the stones, and she took the ice-cold hand in hers: it was not Steenie's! She took the candle, and leaned across to see the face. God in heaven! there was the mark of her whip: it was Francie Gordon! She tried to

rouse him. She could not ; he was cold as ice, and seemed all but dead. But for the groan she had heard she would have been sure he was dead. She blew out the light, and, swift as her hands could move, took garment after garment off, and laid it, warm from her live heart, over and under him—all save one which she thought too thin to do him any good. Last of all, she drew her stockings over his hands and arms, and, leaving her shoes where Steenie's had lain, darted out of the cave. At the mouth of it she rose erect like one escaped from the tomb, and sped in dim-gleaming whiteness over the snow, scarce to have been seen against it. The moon was but a shred—a withered autumn leaf low fallen toward the dim plain of the west. As she ran she would have seemed to one of Steenie's angels, out that night on the hill, a newly disembodied ghost fleeing home. Swift and shadowless as the thought of her own brave heart, she ran. Her sense of power and speed was glorious. She felt—not thought—herself a human goddess, the daughter of the Eternal. Up height and down hollow

she flew, running her race with death, not an open eye, save the eyes of her father and mother, within miles of her in a world of sleep and snow and night. Nor did she slacken her pace as she drew near the house, she only ran more softly. At last she threw the door to the wall, and shot up the steep stair to her room, calling her mother as she went.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BACK FROM THE GRAVE

WHEN David came in to supper, he said nothing, expecting Kirsty every moment to appear. Marion was the first to ask what had become of her. David answered she had left him in the workshop.

‘ Bless the bairn ! what can she be aboot this time o’ nicht ? ’ said her mother.

‘ I kenna,’ returned David.

When they had sat eating their supper for ten minutes, vainly expecting her, David went out to look for her. Returning unsuccessful, he found that Marion had sought her all over the house with like result. Then they became uneasy.

Before going to look for her, however, David had

begun to suspect her absence in one way or another connected with the subject of their conversation in the workshop, to which he had not for the moment meant to allude. When now he told his wife what had passed, he was a little surprised to find that immediately she grew calm.

‘Ow, than, she’ll be wi’ Steenie!’ she said.

Nor did her patience fail, but revived that of her husband. They could not, however, go to bed, but sat by the fire, saying a word or two now and then. The slow minutes passed, and neither of them moved save David once to put on peats.

The house-door flew open suddenly, and they heard Kirsty cry, ‘Mother, mother!’ but when they hastened to the door, no one was there. They heard the door of her room close, however, and Marion went up the stair. By the time she reached it, Kirsty was in a thick petticoat and buttoned-up cloth-jacket, had a pair of shoes on her bare feet, and was glowing a ‘celestial rosy-red.’ David stood where he was, and in half a minute Kirsty came in three leaps down the

stair to him, to say that Francie was lying in the weem. In less than a minute the old soldier was out with the stable-lantern, harnessing one of the horses, the oldest in the stable, good at standing, and not a bad walker. He called for no help, yet was round at the door so speedily as to astonish even Kirsty, who stood with her mother in the entrance by a pile of bedding. They put a mattress in the bottom of the cart, and plenty of blankets. Kirsty got in, lay down and covered herself up, to make the rough ambulance warm, and David drove off. They soon reached the *weem* and entered it.

The moment Kirsty had lighted the candle,

‘Lassie,’ cried David, ‘there’s been a wuman here!’

‘It luiks like it,’ answered Kirsty: ‘I was here mysel, father!’

‘Ay, ay! of coorse, but here’s claes—wuman’s claes! Whaur can they frae? Wha’s claes can they be?’

‘Wha’s but mine?’ returned Kirsty, as she stooped to remove from his face the garment that covered his head.

‘The Lord preserve ’s!—to the verra stockins upo’ the han’s o’ ’m!’

‘I had no dreid, father, o’ the Lord seein me as he made me!’

‘Lassie,’ cried David, with heartfelt admiration, ‘ye sud hae been dother til a field-mershall.’

‘I wudna be dother til a king!’ returned Kirsty. ‘Gien I hed to be born again, I wudna be born ’cep it was to Dauvid Barclay.’

‘My ain lassie!’ murmured her father. ‘But, eh,’ he added, interrupting his own thoughts, ‘we maun haud oor tongues till we’ve dune the thing we’re sent to du!’

They bent at once to their task.

David was a strong man still, and Kirsty was as good at a lift as most men. They had no difficulty in raising Gordon between them, David taking his head and Kirsty his feet, but it was not without difficulty they got him through the passage. In the cart they covered him so that, had he been a new-born baby, he could have taken no harm except it were by suffoca-

tion, and then, Kirsty sitting with his head in her lap, they drove home as fast as the old horse could step out.

In the meantime Marion had got her best room ready, and warm. When they reached it, Francie was certainly still alive, and they made haste to lay him in the hot feather-bed. In about an hour they thought he swallowed a little milk. Neither Kirsty nor her parents went to bed that night, and by one or other of them the patient was constantly attended.

Kirsty took the first watch, and was satisfied that his breathing grew more regular, and by and by stronger. After a while it became like that of one in a troubled sleep. He moved his head a little, and murmured like one dreaming painfully. She called her father, and told him he was saying words she could not understand. He took her place and sat near him, when presently his soldier-ears, still sharp, heard indications of a hot siege. Once he started up on his elbow, and put his hand to the side of his head. For a moment he looked wildly awake, then sank back and went to sleep again.

As Marion was by him in the morning, all at once he spoke again, and more plainly.

‘Go away, mother!’ he said. ‘I am not mad. I am only troubled in my mind. I will tell my father you killed me.’

Marion tried to rouse him, telling him his mother should not come near him. He did not seem to understand, but apparently her words soothed him, for he went to sleep once more.

He was gaunt and ghastly to look at. The scar on his face, which Kirsty had taken for the mark of her whip, but which was left by the splinter that woke him, remained red and disfiguring. But the worst of his look was in his eyes, whose glances wandered about uneasy and searching. It was clear all was not right with his brain. I doubt if any other of his tenants would have recognized him.

For a good many days he was like one awake yet dreaming, always dreading something, invariably starting when the door opened, and when quietest would lie gazing at the one by his bedside as if

puzzled. He took in general what food they brought him, but at times refused it quite. They never left him alone for more than a moment.

So far were they from giving him up to his mother, that the mere idea of letting her know he was with them never entered the mind of one of them. To the doctor, whom at once they had called in, there was no need to explain the right by which they constituted themselves his guardians : anyone would have judged it better for him to be with them than with her. David said to himself that when Francie wanted to leave them he should go ; but he had sought refuge with them, and he should have it : nothing should make him give him up except legal compulsion.

CHAPTER XXXV

FRANCIS COMES TO HIMSELF

ONE morning, Kirsty sitting beside him, Francis started to his elbow as if to get up, then seeing her, lay down again with his eyes fixed upon her. She glanced at him now and then, but would not seem to notice him much. He gazed for two or three minutes, and then said, in a low, doubtful, almost timid, voice,

‘Kirsty?’

‘Ay; what is’t, Francie?’ returned Kirsty.

‘Is’t yersel, Kirsty?’ he said.

‘Ay, wha ither, Francie!’

‘Are ye angry at me, Kirsty?’

‘No a grain. What gars ye speir sic a queston?’

‘Eh, but ye gae me sic a ane wi’ yer whup—jist here upo’ the haffit! Luik.’

He turned the side of his head toward her, and stroked the place, like a small, self-pitying child. Kirsty went to him, and kissed it like a mother. She had plainly perceived that such a scar could not be from her blow, but it added grievously to her pain at the remembrance of it that the poor head which she had struck, had in the very same place been torn by a splinter—for so the doctor said. If her whip left any mark, the splinter had obliterated it.

‘And syne,’ he resumed, ‘ye ca’d me a cooard!’

‘Did I du that, ill wuman ’at I was!’ she returned, with tenderest maternal soothing.

He laid his arms round her neck, drew her feebly toward him, hid his head on her bosom, and wept.

Kirsty put her arm round him, held him closer, and stroked his head with her other hand, murmuring words of much meaning though little sense. He drew back his head, looked at her beseechingly, and said,

‘*Div* ye think me a cooard, Kirsty?’

‘No wi’ men,’ answered the truthful girl, who would not lie even in ministration to a mind diseased.

‘Maybe ye think I oucht to hae strucken ye back whan ye strack me? I *will* be a cooard than, lat ye say what ye like. I never did, and I never will hit a lassie, lat her kill me!’

‘It wasna that, Francie. Gien I ca’d ye a cooard, it was ’at ye behaved sae ill to Phemy.’

‘Eh, the bonny little Phemy! I had ’maist forgotten her! Hoo is she, Kirsty?’

‘She’s weel—and verra weel,’ answered Kirsty; ‘she’s deid.’

‘Deid!’ echoed Gordon, with a cry, again raising himself on his elbow. ‘Surely it wasna—it wasna ’at the puir wee thing cudna forget me! The thing’s no possible! I wasna worth it!’

‘Na, na; it wasna ae grain that! Her deein had naething to du wi that—nor wi you in ony w’y. I dinna believe she was a hair waur for ony nonsense ye said til her—shame o’ ye as it was! She dee’d upo’

the Horn, ae awfu' tempest o' a nicht. She cudna hae suffert lang, puir thing! She hadna the stren'th to suffer muckle. Sae awa she gaed!—and Steenie efter her!' added Kirsty in a lower tone, but Francis did not seem to hear, and said no more for a while.

'But I maun tell ye the trowth, Kirsty,' he resumed: 'forby yersel, there's them 'at says I'm a cooard!'

'I h'ard ae man say't, only ane, and him only ance.'

'And ye said til 'im, "Ay, I hae lang kenned that!"'

'I tellt him whaever said it was a leear!'

'But ye believt it yersel, Kirsty!'

'Wad ye hae me leear and hypocrite forby, to ca' fowk ill names for sayin what I believt mysel!'

'But I *am* a cooard, Kirsty!'

'Ye are *not*, Francie. I wunna believe't though yersel say 't! It's naething but a dist o' styte and nonsense 'at's won in throu the cracks ye got i' yer heid, fechtin. Ye was aye a daft kin' o' a cratur,

Francie! Gien onybody ever said it, mak ye speed and get yer health again, and syne ye can shaw him plain 'at he's a leear.'

'But I tell ye, Kirsty, I ran awa!'

'I fancy ye wud hae been naething but a muckle idiot gien ye hadna!—Ye didna ley onybody in trouble!—did ye noo?'

'No a sowl 'at I ken o'. Na, I didna do that. The fac was—but nae blame to them—they a' gaed awa and left me my lane, sleepin. I maun hae been terrible tired.'

'I telled ye sae!' cried Kirsty. 'Jist gang ower the story to me, Francie, and I s' tell ye whether ye're a cooard or no. I dinna believe a stime o' 't! Ye never was, and never was likly to be a cooard. I s' be at the boddom o' 't wi' whaever daur threpe me sic a lee!'

But Francis showed such signs of excitement as well as exhaustion, that Kirsty saw she must not let him talk longer.

'Or I'll tell ye what!' she added: '—ye'll tell father

and mother and me the haill tale, this verra nicht, or maybe the morn's mornin. Ye maun hae an egg noo, and a drappy o' milk—creamy milk, Francie! Ye aye likit that!

She went and prepared the little meal, and after taking it he went to sleep.

In the evening, with the help of their questioning, he told them everything he could recall from the moment he woke to find the place abandoned, not omitting his terrors on the way, until he overtook the rear of the garrison.

'I dinna won'er ye was fleyt, Francie,' said Kirsty. 'I wud hae been fleyt mysel, wantin my sword, and kennin nae God to trust til! Ye maun learn to ken *him*, Francie, and syne ye'll be feart at naething!'

After that, his memory was only of utterly confused shapes, many of which must have been fancies. The only things he could report were the conviction pervading them all that he had disgraced himself, and the consciousness that everyone treated him as a deserter, and gave him the cold shoulder.

His next recollection was of coming home to, or rather finding himself with his mother, who, the moment she saw him, flew into a rage, struck him in the face, and called him coward. She must have taken him, he thought, to some place where there were people about him who would not let him alone, but he could remember nothing more until he found himself creeping into a hole which he seemed to know, thinking he was a fox with the hounds after him.

‘What ’s my claes like, Kirsty?’ he asked at this point.

‘They war no that gran’,’ answered Kirsty, her eyes smarting with the coming tears; ‘but ye’ll ne’er see a stick (*stitch*) o’ them again: I pat them awa.’

‘What w’y ’ill I win up, wantin’ them?’ he rejoined, with a tremor of anxiety in his voice.

‘We’ll see aboot that, time eneuch,’ answered Kirsty.

‘But my mither may be efter me! I wud fain be up! There’s no sayin what she michtna be up til! She canna bide me!’

‘Dreid ye naething, Francie. Ye’re no a match for my leddy, but I s’ be atween ye and her. She’s no sae fearsome as she thinks ! Onygait, she disna fleg *me*.’

‘I left some guid eneuch claes there whan I gaed awa, and I daursay they’re i’ my room yet—gien only I kenned hoo to win at them !’

‘I s’ gang and get them til ye—the verra day ye’re fit to rise. But ye maunna speyk a word mair the nicht.’

CHAPTER XXXVI

KIRSTY BESTIRS HERSELF

THEY held a long consultation that night as to what they must do. Plainly the first and most important thing was to rid Francis of the delusion that he had disgraced himself in the eyes of his fellow-officers. This would at once wake him as from a bad dream to the reality of his condition: convinced of the unreality of the idea that possessed him, he would at once, they believed, resume his place in the march of his generation through life.

To find means, then, for the attainment of this end, they set their wits to work; and it was almost at once clear to David that the readiest way would be to enter into communication with any they

could reach of the officers under whom he had served. His regiment having by this time, however, with the rest of the Company's soldiers, passed into the service of the Queen, a change doubtless involving many other changes concerning which Francis, even were he fit to be questioned, could give no information, David resolved to apply to sir Haco Macintosh, who had succeeded Archibald Gordon in the command, for assistance in finding those who could bear the testimony he desired to possess.

‘Divna ye think, father,’ said Kirsty, ‘it wud be the surest and speediest w’y for me to gang mysel to sir Haco?’

‘Deed it wud be that, Kirsty!’ answered David. ‘There’s naething like the bodily presence o’ the leevin sowl to gar things gang!’

To this Marion, although at first not a little appalled at the thought of Kirsty alone in such a huge city as Edinburgh, could not help assenting, and the next morning Kirsty started, bearing a letter from

her father to his old officer, in which he begged for her the favour of a few minutes' conference on business concerning her father and the son of the late colonel Gordon.

Sir Haco had retired from the service some years before the mutiny, and was living in one of the serenely gloomy squares of the Scots capital. Kirsty left her letter at the door, and calling the next day, was shown to the library, where lady Macintosh as well as sir Haco awaited, with curious and kindly interest, the daughter of the man they had known so well, and respected so much.

When Kirsty entered the room, dressed very simply in a gown of dark cloth and a plain straw bonnet, the impression she at once made was more than favourable, and they received her with a kindness and courtesy that made her feel herself welcome. They were indeed of her own kind.

Sir Haco was one of the few men who, regarding constantly the reality, not the show of things, keep throughout their life, however long, great part of their

youth, and all their childhood. Deeper far in his heart than any of the honours he had received, all unsought but none undeserved, lay the memory of a happy and reverential boyhood. Sprung from a peasant stock, his father was a man of 'high erected thought seated in a heart of courtesy.'

He was well matched with his wife, who, though born to a far higher social position in which simplicity is rarer, was, like him, true and humble and strong. They had one daughter, who grew up only to die: the moment they saw Kirsty, their hearts went out to her.

For there was in Kirsty that unassumed, unconscious dignity, that simple propriety, that naturalness of a carriage neither trammelled nor warped by thought of self, which at once awakes confidence and regard; while her sweet, unaffected 'book English,' in which appeared no attempt at speaking like a fine lady, no disastrous endeavour to avoid her country's utterance, revealed at once her genuine cultivation. Sir Haco said afterward that when she spoke Scotch

it was good and thorough, and when she spoke English it was Wordsworthian.

Listening to her first words, and reminded of the solemn sententious way in which sergeant Barclay used to express himself, his face rose clear in his mind's eye, he saw it as it were reflected in his daughter's, and broke out with—

‘Eh, lassie, but ye’re like yer father!’

‘Ye min’ upon him, sir?’ rejoined Kirsty, with her perfect smile.

‘Min’ upon him! Naebody worth *his* min’in upo’ could ever forget him! Sit ye doon, and tell’s a’ aboot him!’

Kirsty did as she was told. She began at the beginning, and explained first, what doubtless sir Haco knew at least something of before, the relation between her father and colonel Gordon, whence his family as well as himself had always felt it their business to look after the young laird. Then she told how, after a long interval, during which they could do nothing, a sad opportunity had at length been given

them of at least attempting to serve him; and it was for aid in this attempt that she now sought sir Haco, who could direct her toward the procuring of certain information.

‘And what sort of information do you think I can give or get for you, Miss Barclay?’ asked sir Haco.

‘I’ll explain the thing to ye, sir, in as feow words as I can,’ answered Kirsty, dropping her English. ‘The young laird has taen ’t intil his heid that he didna carry himsel like a man i’ the siege, and it’s grown to be in him what they ca’ a fixt idea. He was left, ye see, sir, a’ himlane i’ the beleaguert toon, and I fancy the suddent waukin and the discovery that he was there his lee lane, jist pat him beside himsel.’

Here she told the whole story, as they had gathered it from Francis, mingling it with some elucidatory suggestions of her own, and having ended her narration, went on thus:—

‘Ye see, sir, and my ledly, he was little better nor a laddie, and fowk ’at sair needs company, like Francie, misses company ower sair. Men’s no able—*some*

men, my leddy—to tak coonsel wi' their ain herts, as women whiles learns to du. And sae, whan he cam oot o' the fricht, he was ower sair upon himsel for bein i' the fricht. For it seems to me there's no shame in bein frichtit, sae lang as ye dinna serve and obey the fricht, but trust in him 'at sees, and du what ye hae to du. Naebody 'at kenned Francie as I did, cud ever believe he faun' mair fear in 's hert nor was lawfu' and rizzonable—sae lang, that is, as he was in his richt min': ayont that nane but his maker can jeedge him. I dinna mean Francie was a pettern, but, sir, he was no cooard—and that I ken, for I 'm no cooard mysel, please God to keep me as he 's made me. But the laddie—the man, I suld say—he's no to be persuaudit oot o' the fancy o' his ain cooardice; and I dinna believe he'll ever win oot o' 't wantin the testimony o' his fellow-officers, wha o' them may be left to grant the same. And I canna but think, gien ye'll excuse me, sir, that, for his father's sake, it wud be a gracious ac' to tak him intil the queen's service, and lat him haud on fechtin for 's

country, whaurever it may please her mejesty to want him. — Oot whaur he was afore might be best for him—I dinna ken. It wad be to put his country's seal upo' their word.'

'Surely, Miss Barclay, you wouldn't set the poor lad in the forefront of danger again!' said lady Macintosh.

'I wud that, my lady! I canna but think the airmy, savin for this misadventur—gien there be ony sic thing as misadventur—hed a fair chance o' makin a man o' Francie; and whiles I canna help doobtin gien onything less 'ill ever restore him til himsel but restorin him til 's former position. It wud ony gait gie him the best chance o' shawin til himsel 'at there wasna a hair o' the cooard upon him.'

'But,' said sir Haco, 'would her majesty be justified in taking the risk involved? Would it not be to peril many for a doubtful good to one?'

Kirsty was silent for a moment, with downcast eyes.

'I'm answert, sir—as to that p'int,' she said, looking up.

'For my part,' said lady Macintosh, 'I can't help

thinking that the love of a good woman like yourself must do more for the poor fellow than the approval of all the soldiers in the world.—Pardon me, Haco.'

'Indeed, my lady, you're perfectly right!' returned her husband with a smile.

But lady Macintosh hardly heard him, so startled, almost so frightened was she at the indignation instantly on Kirsty's countenance.

'Putna things intil ony heid, my leddy, 'at the hert wud never put there. It wad be an ill fulfillin o' my father's duty til his auld colonel, no to say his auld frien, to coontenance sic a notion!'

'I beg your pardon, Miss Barclay; I was wrong to venture the remark. But may I say in excuse, that it is not unnatural to imagine a young woman, doing so much for a young man, just a little bit in love with him?'

'I wud fain hae yer leddyship un'erstaun,' returned Kirsty, 'that my father, my mother, and mysel, we're jist ane and nae mair. No ane o' 's hes a wuss that disna belang to a' three. The langest I can min',

it's been my ae ambition to help my father and mother to du what they wantit. I never desirit merriage, my leddy, and gien I did, it wudna be wi' sic as Francie Gordon, weel as I lo'e him, for we war bairnies, and laddie and lassie thegither: I wudna hae a man it was for me to fin' faut wi'! 'Deed, mem, what fowk ca's love, hes neither airt nor pairt i' this metter!'

Not to believe the honest glow in Kirsty's face, and the clear confident assertion of her eyes, would have shown a poor creature in whom the faculty of belief was undeveloped.

Sir Haco and lady Macintosh insisted on Kirsty's taking up her abode with them while she was in Edinburgh; and Kirsty, partly in the hope of expediting the object of her mission thereby, and partly because her heart was drawn to her new friends, gladly consented. Before a week was over, like understanding like, her hostess felt as if she were a daughter until now long waiting for her somewhere in the infinite.

The self-same morning, sir Haco sat down to his

study-table, and began writing to every officer alive who had served with Francis Gordon, requesting to know his feeling, and that of the regiment about him. Within three days he received the first of the answers, which kept dropping in for the next six months. They all described Gordon as rather a scatterbrain, as not the less a favourite with officers and men, and as always showing the courage of a man, or rather of a boy, seeing he not unfrequently acted with a reprehensible recklessness that smacked a little of display.

‘That’s Francie himself!’ cried Kirsty, with the tears in her eyes, when her host read, to this effect, the first result of his inquiry.

Within a fortnight he received also, from one high in office, the assurance that, if Mr. Gordon, on his recovery, wished to enter her majesty’s service, he should have his commission.

While her husband was thus kindly occupied, lady Macintosh was showing Kirsty every loving attention she could think of, and, in taking her about Edinburgh and its neighbourhood, found that the country girl

knew far more of the history of Scotland than she did herself.

She would gladly have made her acquainted with some of her friends, but Kirsty shrank from the proposal: she could not forget how her hostess had herself misinterpreted the interest she took in Francie Gordon. As soon as she felt that she could do so without seeming ungrateful, she bade her new friends farewell, and hastened home, carrying with her copies of the answers which sir Haco had up to that time received.

When she arrived it was with such a glad heart that, at sight of Francis in her father's Sunday clothes, she laughed so merrily that her mother said 'The lassie maun be fey!' Haggard as he looked, the old twinkle awoke in his eye responsive to her joyous amusement; and David, coming in the next moment from putting up the gray mare with which he had met the coach to bring Kirsty home, saw them all three laughing in such an abandonment of mirth as, though unaware of the immediate motive, he could not help joining.

The same evening Kirsty went to the castle, and

Mrs. Bremner needed no persuasion to find the suit which the young laird had left in his room, and give it to her to carry to its owner ; so that, when he woke the next morning, Francis saw the gray garments lying by his bed-side in place of David's black, and felt the better for the sight.

The letters Kirsty had brought, working along with returning health, and the surrounding love and sympathy most potent of all, speedily dispelled his yet lingering delusion. It had occasionally returned in force while Kirsty was away, but now it left him altogether.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A GREAT GULF

It was now midsummer, and Francis Gordon was well, though thin and looking rather delicate. Kirsty and he had walked together to the top of the Horn, and there sat, in the heart of old memories. The sun was clouded above ; the boggy basin lay dark below, with its rim of heathery hills not yet in bloom, and its bottom of peaty marsh, green and black, with here and there a shining spot ; the growing crops of the far-off farms on the other side but little affected the general impression the view gave of a waste world ; yet the wide expanse of heaven and earth lifted the heart of Kirsty with an indescribable sense of presence, purpose, promise. For was it not the country on

which, fresh from God, she first opened the eyes of this life, the visible region in which all her efforts had gone forth, in which all the food of her growth had been gathered, in which all her joys had come to her, in which all her loves had had their scope, the place whence by and by she would go away to find her brother with the bonny man !

Francis saw without heeding. His heart was not uplifted. His earthly future, a future of his own imagining, drew him.

‘This winna du ony langer, Kirsty!’ he said at length. ‘The accusin angel ’ll be upo’ me again or I ken ! I maunna be idle ’cause I’m happy ance mair—thanks to you, Kirsty ! Little did I think ever to raise my heid again ! But noo I maun be at my wark ! I’m fit eneuch !’

‘I’m richt glaid to hear’t!’ answered Kirsty. ‘I was jist thinkin lang for a word o’ the sort frae ye, Francie. I didna want to be the first to speyk o’ ’t.’

‘And I was just thinkin lang to hear ye speyk o’ ’t!’

returned Francis. 'I wantit to du't as the thing ye wad hae o' me!'

'Even than, Francie, ye wudna, it seems, hae been doin 't to please me, and that pleases me weel! I wud be nane pleast to think ye duin 't for me! It wud gie me a sair hert, Francie!'

'What for that, Kirsty?'

'Cause it wud shaw ye no a man yet! A man's a man 'at dis what's richt, what's pleasin to the verra hert o' richt. Ye'll please me best by no wantin to please me; and ye'll please God best by duin what he's putten intil yer hert as the richt thing, and the bonny thing, and the true thing, though ye suld dee i' the duin o' 't.—Tell me what ye're thinkin o' duin.'

'What but gaeing efter this new commission they hae promised me? There's aye a guid chance o' fechtin upo' the borders—the frontiers, as they ca' them!'

Kirsty sat silent. She had been thinking much of what Francis ought to do, and had changed her mind

on the point since the time when she talked about him with sir Haco.

‘Isna that what ye wud hae me du, Kirsty?’ he said, when he found she continued silent. ‘A body’s no a fule for wantin guid advice!’

‘No, that’s true eneuch! What for wad ye want to gang fechtin?’

‘To shaw the warl’ I’m nane o’ what my mither ca’d me.’

‘And shawn that, hoo muckle the better man wud ye be for ’t? Min’ ye it’s ae thing to be, and anither to shaw. *Be ye maun; shaw ye needna.*’

‘I dinna ken; I micht be growin better a’ the time!’

‘And ye micht be growin waur.—What the better wud ony neebour be for ye gane fechtin? Wudna it be a’ for yersel? Is there naething gien intil yer han’ to du—naething nearer hame nor that? Surely o’ twa things, ane near and ane far, the near comes first!’

‘I dinna ken. I thought ye wantit me to gang!’

‘Ay, raither nor bide at hame duin naething; but michtna there be something better to du?’

‘I dinna ken. I thought to please ye, Kirsty, but it seems naething wull!’

‘Ay; that’s whaur the mischief lies. Ye thought to please *me*.’

‘I did think to please you, Kirsty! I thought, ance dune weel afore the warl’ as my father did, I micht hae the face to come hame to you, and say—
“Kirsty, wull ye hae me?”’

‘Aye the same auld Francie!’ said Kirsty, with a deep sigh.

‘Weel?’

‘I tell ye, Francie, i’ the name o’ God, I’ll never hae ye on nae sic terms!—Suppose I was to merry somebody whan ye was awa pruv’in to yersel, and a’ the lave ’at never misdoobted ye, ’at ye was a brave man—what wud ye du whan ye cam hame?’

‘Naething o’ mortal guid! Tak to the drink, maybe.’

‘Ye tell me that! and ye think, wi’ my een open

to ken 'at ye say true, I wud merry ye?—a man like you! Eh, Francie, Francie! ye're no worth my takin, and ye're no like to be worth the takin o' ony honest wuman!—Can ye possibly imegine a wuman merryin a man 'at she kenned wud drive her to coontless petitions to be hauden ohn despisit him? Ye mak my hert unco sair, Francie! I hae dune my best wi' ye, and the en' o' 't is, 'at ye're no worth naething!'

'For the life o' me, Kirsty, I dinna ken what ye're drivin at, or what ye wud hae o' me! I canna but think ye're usin me as ye wudna like to be used yersel!'

'Deed I wud not like it gien I was o' your breed, Francie! Man, did ye never ance i' yer life think what ye *hed* to du—what was gien ye to du—what it was yer duty to du?'

'No sae aften, doobtless, as I oucht. But I'm ready to hear ye tell me my duty; I'm no past reasonin wi'!'

'Did ye never hear 'at ye're to lo'e yer neebour as yersel?'

‘I’m duin that wi’ a’ my hert, Kirsty—and that ye ken as weel as I du mysel!’

‘Ye mean me, Francie! And ye ca’ that lo’in me, to wull me merry a man ’at ’s no a man ava! But it’s nae me ’at’s yer neebour, Francie!’

‘Wha *is* my neebour, Kirsty?’

‘The queston’s been speirt afore—and answert.’

‘And what’s the answer til’t?’

‘At yer neebour ’s jist whaever lies neist ye i’ need o’ yer help. Gien ye read the tale o’ the guid Sameritan wi’ ony sort o’ gumption, that’s what ye’ll read intil ’t and noucht else. The man or wuman ye can help, ye hae to be neebour til.’

‘I want to help you.’

‘Ye canna help me. I’m in no need o’ yer help. And the queston’s no whaur’s the man I *nicht* help, but whaur’s the man I *maun* help. I wantit to be *your* neebour, but I cudna win at ye for the thieves; ye *wad* stick to them, and they wudna lat me du naething.’

‘What thieves, i’ the name o’ common sense, Kirsty?’

‘Love o’ yer ain gait, and love o’ makin a show,
and want o’ care for what ’s richt. Aih, Francie, I
doobt something a heap waur ’ll hae to come upo’ ye !
A’ my labour’s lost, and I dearly grudge it—no the
labour, but the loss o’ ’t ! I grudge that sair.’

‘Kirsty, i’ the name o’ God, wha *is* my neebour ?’

‘Yer ain mither.’

‘My ain mither !—*her* oot o’ a’ the warl’ ?—I never
cam upo’ spark o’ rizzon intil her !’

‘Michtna she be that ane, oot o’ a’ the warl’, ye
never shawed spark o’ rizzon til ?’

‘There’s nae place in her for reason to gang til !’

‘Ye never tried her wi’ ’t ! Ye wud arguy wi’ her
mair nor plenty, but did ye ever shaw her rizzon i’ yer
behaviour ?’

‘Weel, ye *are* turnin agen me—you ’at ’s saved my
life frae her ! Didna I tell you hoo, whan I wan
hame at last and gaed til her, for she was aye guid
to me when I wasna weel, she fell oot upo’ me like a
verra deevil, ragin and ca’in me ill names, ’at I jist
ran frae the hoose—and ye ken whaur ye faun’ me !

Gien it hadna been for you, I wud have been deid :
I was waur nor deid a'ready ! What w'y *can* I be
neebour to *her* ! It wud be naething but cat and dog
atween's frae mornin to nicht !'

' Ae body canna be cat and dog baith ! And the dog's
as ill's the cat—whiles waur !'

' Ony dog wud yowl gien ye threw a kettle o' bilin
watter ower him !'

' Did she that til ye ?'

' She mintit at it. I ran frae her. She hed the
toddy-kettle in her han', and she splasht it in her ain
face tryin to fling't at me.'

' Maybe she didna ken ye !'

' She kenned me weel eneuch. She ca'd me by my
ain as weel 's ither names.'

' Ye're jist croonin my arguymnt, Francie ! Yer
mither's jist perishin o' drink ! She drinks and drinks,
and, by what I hear, cares for noucht else. A' 's upo'
the ro'd to ruin in her and aboot her. She hasna the
brains noo, gien ever she hed them, to guide hersel.
Is Satan to grip her 'cause ye winna be neebour til

her and haud him aff o' her? I ken ye're a guid son sae far as lat her du as she likes and tak 'maist a' the siller, but that's what greases the exle o' the cairt the deevil's gotten her intil! I ken weel she hesna been muckle o' a mither til ye, but ye're her son whan a' 's said. And there can be naething ye're callt upon to du, sae lang as she's i' the grup o' the enemy, but rugg her oot o' 't. Gien ye dinna that, ye'll never be oot o' 's grup yersel. Ye come oot thegither, or ye bide thegither.'

Gordon sat speechless.

'It's impossible!' he said at length.

'Francie,' rejoined Kirsty, very quietly and solemnly, 'ye're yer mother's keeper; ye're her neist neebour: are ye gauin to du yer duty by her, or are ye not?'

'I canna; I daurna; I'm a cooard afore her.'

'Gien ye lat her gang on to disgrace yer father, no to say yersel—and that by means o' what's yours and no hers, I'll say mysel 'at ye're a cooard.'

'Come hame wi' me and tak my pairt, and I'll promise ye to du my best.'

‘Ye maun tak yer ain pairt; and ye maun tak her pairt tu against hersel.’

‘It’s no to be thought o’, Kirsty!’

‘Ye winna?’

‘I canna my lane. I winna try ’t. It wud be waur nor useless.’

Kirsty rose, turning her face homeward. Gordon sprang to his feet. She was already three yards from him.

‘Kirsty! Kirsty!’ he cried, going after her.

She went straight for home, never showing by turn of head, by hesitation of step, or by change of carriage, that she heard his voice or his feet behind her.

When they had thus gone two or three hundred yards, he quickened his pace, and laid his hand on her arm.

She stopped and faced him. He dropped his hand, grew yet whiter, and said not a word. She walked on again. Like one in a dream he followed, his head hanging, his eyes on the heather. She went on faster. He was falling behind her, but did not know it. Down

and down the hill he followed, and only at the earth-house lifted his head: she was nearly over the opposite brae! He had let her go! He might yet have overtaken her, but he knew that he had lost her.

He had no home, no refuge! Then first, not when alone in the beleaguered city, he knew desolation. He had never knocked at the door of heaven, and earth had closed hers! An angel who needed no flaming sword to make her awful, held the gate of his lost paradise against him. None but she could open to him, and he knew that, like God himself, Kirsty was inexorable. Left alone with that last terrible look from the eyes of the one being he loved, he threw himself in despair on the ground. True love is an awful thing, not to the untrue only, but sometimes to the growing-true, for to everything that can be burned it is a consuming fire. Never more, it seemed, would those eyes look in at his soul's window without that sad, indignant repudiation in them! He rose, and crept into the earth-house.

Kirsty lost herself in prayer as she went. 'Lord, I

hae dune a' I can !' she said. ' Until thou hast dune something by thyself, I can do naething mair. He's i' thy han's still, I praise thee, though he's oot o' mine ! Lord, gien I hae dune him ony ill, forgie me ; a pair human body canna ken aye the best ! Dinna lat him suffer for my ignorance, whether I be to blame for 't or no. I will try to do whatever thou makest plain to me.'

By the time she reached home she was calm. Her mother saw and respected her solemn mood, gave her a mother's look, and said nothing : she knew that Kirsty, lost in her own thoughts, was in good company.

What was passing in the soul of Francis Gordon, I can only indicate, I cannot show. The most mysterious of all vital movements, a generation, a transition, was there—how initiated, God only knows. Francis knew neither whence it came nor whither it went. He was being re-born from above. The change was in himself ; the birth was that of his will. It was his own highest action, therefore all God's. He was

passing from death into life, and knew it no more than the babe knows that he is being born. The change was into a new state of being, of the very existence of which most men are incredulous, for it is beyond preconception, capable only of being experienced. Thorough as is the change, the man knows himself the same man, and yet would rather cease to be, than return to what he was. The unknown germ in him, the root of his being, yea, his very being itself, the holy thing which is his intrinsic substance, hitherto unknown to his consciousness, has begun to declare itself, and the worm is passing into the butterfly, the creeping thing into the Psyche. It is a change in which God is the potent presence, but which the man must *will*, or remain the gaoler who prisons in loathsomeness his own God-born self, and chokes the fountain of his own liberty.

Francis knew nothing of all this ; he only felt he must knock at the door behind which Kirsty lived. Kirsty could not open the door to him, but there was one who could, and Francis could knock ! ‘ God help

me !' he cried, as he lay on his face to live, where once he had lain on his face to die. For the rising again is the sepulchre. The world itself is one vast sepulchre for the heavenly resurrection. We are all busy within the walls of our tomb burying our dead, that the corruptible may perish, and the incorruptible go free. Francis Gordon came out of that earth-house a risen man : his will was born. He climbed again to the spot where Kirsty and he had sat together, and there, with the vast clear heaven over his head, threw himself once more on his face, and lifted up his heart to the heart whence he came.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE NEIGHBOURS

HE had eaten nothing since the morning, and felt like one in a calm ethereal dream as he walked home to Weelset in the soft dusk of an evening that would never be night, but die into the day. No one saw him enter the house, no one met him on the ancient spiral stair, as, with apprehensive anticipation, he sought the drawing-room.

He had just set his foot on the little landing by its door when a wild scream came from the room. He flung the door open and darted in. His mother rushed into his arms, enveloped from foot to head in a cone of fire. She was making, in wild flight, for the stair, to reach which would have been death to

her. Francis held her fast, but she struggled so wildly that he had actually to throw her on the floor ere he could do anything to deliver her. Then he flung on her the rug, the table-cover, his coat, and one of the window-curtains, tearing it fiercely from the rings. Having got all these close around her, he rang the bell with an alarum-peal, but had to ring three times, for service in that house was deadened by frequent fury of summons. Two of the maids—there was no manservant in the house now—laid their mistress on a mattress, and carried her to her room. Gordon's hands and arms were so severely burned that he could do nothing beyond directing: he thought he had never felt pain before.

The doctor was sent for, and came speedily. Having examined them, he said Mrs. Gordon's injuries would have caused him no anxiety but for her habits: their consequences might be very serious, and every possible care must be taken of her.

Disabled as he was, Francis sat by her till the morning; and the night's nursing did far more for

himself than for his mother. For, as he saw how she suffered, and interpreted her moans by what he had felt and was still feeling in his own hands and arms, a great pity awoke in him. What a lost life his mother's had been! Was this to be the end of it? The old kindness she had shown him in his childhood and youth, especially when he was in any bodily trouble, came back upon him, and a new love, gathering up in it all the intermittent love of days long gone by, sprang to life in his heart, and he saw that the one thing given him to do was to deliver his mother.

The task seemed, if not easy, yet far from irksome, so long as she continued incapable of resisting, annoying, or deceiving him; but the time speedily came when he perceived that the continuous battle rather than war of duty and inclination must be fought and in some measure won in himself ere he could hope to stir up any smallest skirmish of sacred warfare in the soul of his mother. What added to the acerbities of this preliminary war was, that the very nature of the contest required actions which showed not only un-

becoming in a son, but mean and disgraceful in themselves. There was no pride, pomp, or circumstance of glorious war in this poor, domestic strife, this seemingly sordid and unheroic, miserably unheroic, yet high, eternal contest! But now that Francis was awake to his duty, the best of his nature awoke to meet its calls, and he drew upon a growing store of love for strength to thwart the desires of her he loved. 'Entire affection hateth nicer hands,' and Francis learned not to mind looking penurious and tyrannical, selfish, heartless, and unsympathetic, in the endeavour to be truly loving and lovingly true. He had not Kirsty to support him, but he could now go higher than to Kirsty for the help he needed; he went to the same fountain from which Kirsty herself drew her strength. At the same time frequent thought of her filled him with glad assurance of her sympathy, which was in itself a wondrous aid. He neither saw nor sought to see her: he would not go near her before at least she already knew from other sources what would give her the hope that he was trying to do right.

The gradually approaching strife between mother and son burst out the same moment in which the devilish thirst awoke to its cruel tyranny. It was a mercy to both of them that it re-asserted itself while yet the mother was helpless toward any indulgence of her passion. Francis was no longer afraid of her, but it was the easier because of her condition, although not the less painful for him to frustrate her desire. Neither did it make it the less painful that already her countenance, which the outward fire had not half so much disfigured as that which she herself had applied inwardly, had begun to remind him of the face he had long ago loved a little, but this only made him, if possible, yet more determined that not one shilling of his father's money should go to the degradation of his mother. That she lusted and desired to have, was the worst of reasons why she should obtain! A compelled temperance was of course in itself worthless, but that alone could give opportunity for the waking of what soul was left her. Puny as it was, that might then begin to grow; it

might become aware of the bondage to which it had been subjected, and begin to long for liberty.

In carrying out his resolution, Francis found it specially hard to fight, along with the bad in his mother, the good in himself: the lower forms of love rose against the higher, and had to be put down. To see the scintillation of his mother's eyes at the sound of any liquid, and know how easily he could give her an hour of false happiness, tore his heart, while her fierce abuse hardly passed the portals of his brain. Her condition was so pitiful that her words could not make him angry. She would declare it was he who set her clothes on fire, and as soon as she was up again she would publish to the world what a coward and sneak he showed himself from morning to night. Had Francis been what he once was, his mother and he must soon have come as near absolute hatred as is possible to the human; but he was now so different that the worst answer he ever gave her was,

‘Mother, you *know* you don't mean it!’

‘I mean it with all my heart and soul, Francis,’ she replied, glaring at him.

He stooped to kiss her on the forehead. She struck him on the face so that the blood sprang. He went back a step, and stood looking at her sadly as he wiped it away.

‘Crying!’ she said. ‘You always were a coward, Francis!’

But the word had no more any sting for him.

‘I’m all right, mother. My nose got in the way!’ he answered, restoring his handkerchief to his pocket.

‘It’s the doctor puts him up to it!’ said Mrs. Gordon to herself. ‘But we shall soon be rid of him now! If there’s any more of this nonsense then, I shall have to shut Francis up again! That will teach him how to behave to his mother!’

When at length Mrs. Gordon was able to go about the house again, it was at once to discover that things were not to be as they had been. Then deepened the combat, and at the same time assumed aspects and occasioned situations which in the eye

of the world would have seemed even ludicrously unbecoming. The battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, but how much harder and worthier battles are fought, not in shining armour, but amid filth and squalor physical as well as moral, on a field of wretched and wearisome commonplace !

It was essential to success that there should be no traitor among the servants, and Francis had made them understand what his measures were. Nor was there in this any betrayal of a mother's weakness, for Mrs. Gordon's had long been more than patent to all about her. When, therefore, he one day found her, for the first time, under the influence of strong drink, he summoned them and told them that, sooner than fail of his end, he would part with the whole household, and should be driven to it if no one revealed how the thing had come to pass. Thereupon the youngest, a mere girl, burst into tears, and confessed that she had procured the whisky. Hardly thinking it possible his mother should have money in her

possession, so careful was he to prevent it, he questioned, and found that she had herself provided the half-crown required, and that her mistress had given her in return a valuable brooch, an heirloom, which was hers only to wear, not to give. He took this from her, repaid her the half-crown, gave her her wages up to the next term, and sent Mrs. Bremner home with her immediately. Her father being one of his own tenants, he rode to his place the next morning, laid before him the whole matter, and advised him to keep the girl at home for a year or two.

This one evil success gave such a stimulus to Mrs. Gordon's passion that her rage with her keeper, which had been abating a little, blazed up at once as fierce as at first. But, miserable as the whole thing was, and trying as he found the necessary watchfulness, Gordon held out bravely. At the end of six months, however, during which no fresh indulgence had been possible to her, he had not gained the least ground for hoping that any poorest growth

of strength, or even any waking of desire toward betterment, had taken place in her.

All this time he had not been once to Corbyknowe. He had nevertheless been seeing David Barclay three or four times a week. For Francis had told David how he stood with Kirsty, and how, while refusing him, she had shown him his duty to his mother. He told him also that he now saw things with other eyes, and was endeavouring to do what was right; but he dared not speak to her on the subject lest she should think, as she would, after what had passed between them, be well justified in thinking, that he was doing for her sake what ought to be done for its own. He said to him that, as he was no man of business, and must give his best attention to his mother, he found it impossible for the present to acquaint himself with the state of the property, or indeed attend to it in any serviceable manner; and he begged him, as his father's friend and his own, to look into his affairs, and, so far as his other duties would permit, place things on at least a better footing.

To this petition, David had at once and gladly consented.

He found everything connected with the property in a sad condition. The agent, although honest, was weak, and had so given way to Mrs. Gordon that much havoc had been made, and much money wasted. He was now in bad health, and had lost all heart for his work. But he had turned nothing to his own advantage, and was quite ready, under David's supervision, to do his best for the restoration of order, and the curtailment of expenses.

All that David now saw in his intercourse with the young laird, went to convince him that he was at length a man of conscience, cherishing steady purposes. He reported at home what he saw, and said what he believed, and his wife and daughter perceived plainly that his heart was lighter than it had been for many a day. Kirsty listened, said little, asked a question here and there, and thanked God. For her father brought her not only the good news that Francis was doing his best for his mother, but that he had begun

to open his eyes to the fact that he had his part in the wellbeing of all on his land; that the property was not his for the filling of his pockets, or for the carrying out of schemes of his own, but for the general and individual comfort and progress.

‘I do believe,’ said David, ‘the young laird wud fain mak o’ the lan’s o’ Weelset a spot whauron the e’en o’ the bonny man nicht rist as he gaed by!’

Mrs. Gordon’s temper seemed for a time to have changed from fierce to sullen, but by degrees she began to show herself not altogether indifferent to the continuous attentions of her inexorable son. It is true she received them as her right, but he yielded her a right immeasurably beyond that she would have claimed. He would play draughts or cribbage with her for hours at a time, and every day for months read to her as long as she would listen—read Scott and Dickens and Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade.

One day, after much entreaty, she consented to go out for a drive with him, when round to the door came a beautiful new carriage, and such a pair of horses as

she could not help expressing satisfaction with. Francis told her they were at her command, but if ever she took unfair advantage of them, he would send both carriage and horses away.

She was furious at his daring to speak so to *her*, and had almost returned to her room, but thought better of it and went with him. She did not, however, speak a word to him the whole way. The next morning he let her go alone. After that, he sometimes went with her, and sometimes not : the desire of his heart was to behold her a free woman.

She was quite steady for a while, and her spirits began to return. The hopes of her son rose high ; he almost ceased to fear.

CHAPTER XXXIX

KIRSTY GIVES ADVICE

It was again midsummer, and just a year since they parted on the Horn, when Francis appeared at Corbyknowe, and found Kirsty in the kitchen. She received him as if nothing had ever come between them, but at once noting he was in trouble, proposed they should go out together. It was a long way to be silent, but they had reached the spot, whence they started for the race recorded in my first chapter, ere either of them said a word.

‘ Will ye no sit, Kirsty ? ’ said Francis at length.

For answer she dropped on the same stone where she was sitting when she challenged him to it, and Francis took his seat on its neighbour.

‘I hae had a some sair time o’ ’t sin’ I shawed ye plain hoo little I was worth yer notice, Kirsty!’ he began.

‘Ay,’ returned Kirsty, ‘but ilka hoor o’ ’t hes shawn what the rael Francie was!’

‘I kenna, Kirsty. A’ I can say is—’at I dinna think nearhan sae muckle o’ mysel as I did than.’

‘And I think a heap mair o’ ye,’ answered Kirsty. ‘I canna but think ye upo’ the richt ro’d noo, Francie!’

‘I houp I am, but I’m aye fin’in’ oot something ’at ’ill never du.’

‘And ye’ll keep fin’in’ oot that sae lang ’s there ’s onything left but what ’s like himsel.’

‘I un’erstan ye, Kirsty. But I cam to ye the day, no to say onything aboot mysel, but jist ’cause I cudna du wantin yer help. I wudna hae presumed but that I thoucht, although I dinna deserve ’t, for auld kin’ness ye wud say what ye wud advise.’

‘I’ll du that, Francie—no for auld kin’ness, but for kin’ness never auld. What’s wrang wi’ ye?’

‘Kirsty, wuman, she’s brocken oot again!’

‘I dinna won’er. I hae h’ard o’ sic things.’

‘It’s jist taen the pith oot o’ me! What *am* I to du?’

‘Ye canna du better nor weel; jist begin again.’

‘I had coft her a bonny cairriage, wi’ as fine a pair as ever ye saw, Kirsty, as I daursay yer father has telled ye. And they warna lost upon her, for she had aye a gleg ee for a horse. Ye min’ yon powny?—And up til yesterday, a’ gaed weel, till I was thinkin I cud trust her onygait. But i’ the efternune, as she was oot for an airin, ane o’ the horses cuist a shue, and thinkin naething o’ the risk til a human sowl, but only o’ the risk til the puir horse, the fule fallow stoppit at a smithy nae farrer nor the neist door frae a public, and tuik the horse intil the smithy, lea’in the smith’s lad at the heid o’ the ither horse. Sae what suld my leddy but oot upo’ the side *frae* the smithy, and awa roon the back o’ the cairriage to the public, and in! Whether she took onything there I dinna ken, but she maun hae broucht a bottle hame wi her, for this

mornin she was fou—fou as e'er ye saw man in market !'

He broke down, and wept like a child.

'And what did ye du?' asked Kirsty.

'I said naething. I jist gaed to the coachman and gart him put his horses tu, and tak his denner wi' him, and m'unt the box, and drive straucht awa til Aberdeen, and lea' the carriage whaur I boucht it, and du siclike wi' the horses, and come hame by the co'ch.'

As he ended the sad tale, he glanced up at Kirsty, and saw her regarding him with a look such as he had never seen, imagined, or dreamed of before. It lasted but a moment; her eyes dropt, and she went on with the knitting which, as in the old days, she had brought with her.

'Noo, Kirsty, what am I to du neist?' he said.

'Hae ye naething i' yer ain min'?' she asked.

'Naething.'

'Weel, we'll awa hame!' she returned, rising.

'Maybe, as we gang, we'll get licht!'

They walked in silence. Now and then Francis

would look up in Kirsty's face, to see if anything was coming, but saw only that she was sunk in thought: he would not hurry her, and said not a word. He knew she would speak the moment she had what she thought worth saying.

Kirsty, recalling what her father had repeatedly said of Mrs. Gordon's management of a horse in her young days, had fallen awondering how one who so well understood the equine nature, could be so incapable of understanding the human; for certainly she had little known either Archibald Gordon or David Barclay, and quite as little her own son. Having come to the conclusion that the incapacity was caused by overpowering affection for the one human creature she ought not to love, Kirsty found her thoughts return to the sole faculty her father yielded Mrs. Gordon—that of riding a horse as he ought to be ridden. Thereupon came to her mind a conclusion she had lately read somewhere—namely, that a man ought to regard his neighbour as specially characterized by the possession of this or that virtue or

capacity, whatever it might be, that distinguished him; for that was as the door-plate indicating the proper entrance to his inner house. A moment more and Kirsty thought she saw a way in which Francis might gain a firmer hold on his mother, as well as provide her with a pleasure that might work toward her redemption.

‘Francie,’ she said, ‘I hae thought o’ something. My father has aye said, and ye ken he kens, ’at yer mother was a by ordinar guid rider in her young days, and this is what I wud hae ye du : gang straucht awa, whaurever ye think best, and buy for her the best luikin, best tempered, handiest, and easiest gaein leddy’s-horse ye can lay yer han’s upo’. Ye hae a gey fair beast o’ yer ain, my father says, and ye maun jist ride wi’ her whaurever she gangs.’

‘I’ll du ’t, Kirsty. I canna gang straucht awa, I doobt, though; I fear she has whusky left, and there’s no sayin what she nicht du afore I wan back. I maun gang hame first.’

‘I’m no clear upo’ that. Ye canna weel gang and

rype (*search*) a' the kists and aumries i' the hoose she ca's her ain! That wud anger her terrible. Nor can ye weel lay han's upon her, and tak frae her by force. A wuman nicht du that, but a man, and special a wuman's ain ae son, canna weel du 't—that is, gien there's ony ither coorse 'at can be followt. It seems to me ye maun tak the risk o' her bottle. And it may be no ill thing 'at she sud disgrace hersel oot and oot. Onygait wi' bein awa, and comin back wi' the horse i' yer han' ye'll come afore her like bringin wi' ye a fresh beginnin, a new order o' things like, and that w'y avide words wi' her, and words maun aye be av'idit.'

Francis remained in thoughtful silence.

'I hae little fear,' pursued Kirsty, 'but we'll get her frae the drink a'thegither, and the houp is we may get something better putten intil her. Bein fou whiles, isna the main difficulty. But I beg yer pardon, Francie! I maunna forget 'at she's your mother!'

'Gien ye wud but tak her and me thegither, Kirsty, it wud be a gran' thing for baith o' 's! Wi' you to

tak the half o' 't, I nicht stan' up un'er the weicht o' my responsibility !'

'I'm takin my share o' that, onygait, daurin to advise ye, Francie !—Noo gang, laddie ; gang straucht awa and buy the horse.'

'I maun rin hame first, to put siller i' my pooch ! I s' hand oot o' her gait.'

'Gang til my faither for't. I haena a penny, but he has aye plenty !'

'I maun hae my horse ; there's nae co'ch till the morn's mornin.'

'Gangna near the place. My father 'ill gie ye the gray mear—no an ill ane ava ! She'll tak ye there in four or five hoors, as *ye* ride. Only, min' and gie her a pickle corn ance, and meal and watter twise upo' the ro'd. Gien ye seena the animal ye're sure 'ill please her, gang further, and comena hame wantin 't.'

CHAPTER XL

MRS. GORDON

WHEN Mrs. Gordon came to herself, she thought to behave as if nothing had happened, and rang the bell to order her carriage. The maid informed her that the coachman had driven away with it before lunch, and had not said where he was going.

‘Driven away with it!’ cried her mistress, starting to her feet; ‘I gave him no orders!’

‘I saw the laird giein him directions, mem,’ rejoined the maid.

Mrs. Gordon sat down again. She began to remember what her son had said when first he gave her the carriage.

‘Where did he send him?’ she asked.

‘I dinna ken, mem.’

‘Go and ask the laird to step this way.’

‘Please, mem, he’s no i’ the hoose. I ken, for I saw him gang—hoors ago.’

‘Did he go in the carriage?’

‘No, mem; he gaed upo’ ’s ain fit.’

‘Perhaps he’s come home by this time!’

‘I’m sure he’s no that, mem.’

Mrs. Gordon went to her room, all but finished the bottle of whisky, and threw herself on her bed.

Toward morning she woke with aching head and miserable mind. Now dozing, now tossing about in wretchedness, she lay till the afternoon. No one came near her, and she wanted no one.

At length, dizzy and despairing, her head in torture, and her heart sick, she managed to get out of bed, and, unable to walk, literally crawled to the cupboard in which she had put away the precious bottle:—joy! there was yet a glass in it! With the mouth of it to her lips, she was tilting it up to drain the last drop,

when the voice of her son came cheerily from the drive, on which her window looked down :

‘ See what I’ve brought you, mother !’ he called.

Fear came upon her ; she took the bottle from her mouth, put it again in the cupboard, and crept back to her bed, her brain like a hive buzzing with devils.

When Francis entered the house, he was not surprised to learn that she had not left her room. He did not try to see her.

The next morning she felt a little better, and had some tea. Still she did not care to get up. She shrank from meeting her son, and the abler she grew to think, the more unwilling she was to see him. He came to her room, but she heard him coming, turned her head the other way, and pretended to be asleep. Again and again, almost involuntarily, she half rose, remembering the last of the whisky, but as often lay down again, loathing the cause of her headache.

Stronger and stronger grew her unwillingness to face her son : she had so thoroughly proved herself unfit to be trusted ! She began to feel towards him

as she had sometimes felt toward her mother when she had been naughty. She began to see that she could make her peace, with him or with herself, only by acknowledging her weakness. Aided by her misery, she had begun to perceive that she could not trust herself, and ought to submit to be treated as the poor creature she was. She had resented the idea that she could not keep herself from drink if she pleased, for she knew she could ; but she had not pleased ! How could she ever ask him to trust her again !

What further passed in her, I cannot tell. It is an unfailing surprise when anyone, more especially anyone who has hitherto seemed without strength of character, turns round and changes. The only thing Mrs. Gordon then knew as helping her, was the strong hand of her son upon her, and the consciousness that, had her husband lived, she could never have given way as she had. But there was another help which is never wanting where it can find an entrance ; and now first she began to pray, 'Lead me not into temptation.'

There was one excuse which David alone knew to make for her—that her father was a hard drinker, and his father before him.

Doubtless, during all the period of her excesses, the soul of the woman in her better moments had been ashamed to know her the thing she was. It could not, when she was at her worst, comport with her idea of a lady, poor as that idea was, to drink whisky till she did not know what she did next. And when the sleeping woman God made, wakes up to see in what a house she lives, she will soon grasp at besom and bucket, nor cease her cleansing while spot is left on wall or ceiling or floor.

How the waking comes, who can tell! God knows what he wants us to do, and what we can do, and how to help us. What I have to tell is that, the next morning, Mrs. Gordon came down to breakfast, and finding her son already seated at the table, came up behind him, without a word set the bottle with the last glass of whisky in it before him, went to her place at the table, gave him one sorrowful look, and sat down.

His heart understood, and answered with a throb of joy so great that he knew it first as pain.

Neither spoke until breakfast was almost over. Then Francis said,

‘ You’ve grown so much younger, mother, it is quite time you took to riding again ! I’ve been buying a horse for you. Remembering the sort of pony you bought for me, I thought I should like to try whether I could not please you with a horse of my buying.’

‘ Silly boy !’ she returned, with a rather pitiful laugh, ‘ do you suppose at my age I’m going to make a fool of myself on horseback ? You forget I’m an old woman !’

‘ Not a bit of it, mother ! If ever you rode as David Barclay says you did, I don’t see why you shouldn’t ride still. He’s a splendid creature ! David told me you liked a big fellow. Just put on your habit, mammy, and we’ll take a gallop across, and astonish the old man a bit.’

‘ My dear boy, I have no nerve ! I’m not the woman I was ! It’s my own fault, I know, and I’m both sorry and ashamed.’

‘We are both going to try to be good, mother dear!’ faltered Francis.

The poor woman pressed her handkerchief with both hands to her face, and wept for a few moments in silence, then rose and left the room. In an hour she was ready, and out looking for Francis. Her habit was a little too tight for her, but wearable enough. The horses were sent for, and they mounted.

CHAPTER XLI

TWO HORSEWOMEN

THERE was at Corbyknowe a young, well-bred horse which David had himself reared : Kirsty had been teaching him to carry a lady. For her hostess in Edinburgh, discovering that she was fond of riding and that she had no saddle, had made her a present of her own : she had not used it for many years, but it was in very good condition, and none the worse for being a little old-fashioned. That same morning Kirsty had put on a blue riding-habit, which also lady Macintosh had given her, and was out on the highest slope of the farm, hoping to catch a sight of the two on horseback together, and so learn that her scheme was a success. She had been on the outlook for

about an hour, when she saw them coming along between the castle and Corbyknowe, and went straight for a certain point in the road so as to reach it simultaneously with them. For she had just spied a chance of giving Gordon the opportunity which her father had told her he was longing for, of saying something about her to his mother.

‘Who can that be?’ said Mrs. Gordon as they trotted gently along, when she spied the lady on horseback. ‘She rides well! But she seems to be alone! Is there really nobody with her?’

As she spoke, the young horse came over a *dry-stane-dyke* in fine style.

‘Why, she’s an accomplished horsewoman!’ exclaimed Mrs. Gordon. ‘She must be a stranger! There’s not a lady within thirty miles of Weelset can ride like that!’

‘No such stranger as you think, mother!’ rejoined Francis. ‘That’s Kirsty Barclay of Corbyknowe.’

‘Never, Francis! The girl rides like a lady!’

Francis smiled, perhaps a little triumphantly.

Something like what lay in the smile the mother read in it, for it roused at once both her jealousy and her pride. *Her* son to fall in love with a girl that was not even a lady! A Gordon of Weelset to marry a tenant's daughter! Impossible!

Kirsty was now in the road before them, riding slowly in the same direction. It was the progress, however, not the horse that was slow: his frolics, especially when the other horses drew near, kept his rider sufficiently occupied.

Mrs. Gordon quickened her pace, and passed without turning her head or looking at her, but so close, and with so sudden a rush that Kirsty's horse half wheeled, and bounded over the dyke by the roadside. Her rudeness annoyed her son, and he jumped his horse into the field and joined Kirsty, letting his mother ride on, and contenting himself with keeping her in sight. After a few moments' talk, however, he proposed that they should overtake her, and cutting off a great loop of the road, they passed her at speed, and turned and met her. She had by this time got a

little over her temper, and was prepared to behave with propriety, which meant—the dignity becoming her.

‘What a lovely horse you have, Miss Barclay!’ she said, without other greeting. ‘How much do you want for him?’

‘He is but half-broken,’ answered Kirsty, ‘or I would offer to change with you. I almost wonder you look at him from the back of your own!’

‘He is a beauty—is he not? This is my first trial of him. The laird gave me him only this morning. He is as quiet as a lamb.’

‘There, Donal,’ said Kirsty to her horse, ‘tak example by yer betters! Jist luik hoo he stan’s!—The laird has a true eye for a horse, ma’am,’ she went on, ‘but he always says you gave it him.’

‘Always! hm!’ said Mrs. Gordon to herself, but she looked kindly at her son.

‘How did you learn to ride so well, Kirsty?’ she asked.

‘I suppose I got it from my father, ma’am! I began with the cows.’

‘ Ah, how is old David ?’ returned Mrs. Gordon. ‘ I have seen him once or twice about the castle of late, but have not spoken to him.’

‘ He is very well, thank you.— Will you not come up to the Knowe and rest a moment ? My mother will be very glad to see you.’

‘ Not to-day, Kirsty. I haven’t been on horseback for years, and am already tired. We shall turn here. Good-morning !’

‘ Good-morning, ma’am ! Good-bye, Mr. Gordon !’ said Kirsty cheerfully, as she wheeled her horse to set him straight at a steep grassy brae.

CHAPTER XLII

THE LAIRD AND HIS MOTHER

THE laird and his mother sat and looked at Kirsty as her horse tore up the brae.

‘ She can ride—can’t she, mother ?’ said Francis.

‘ Well enough for a hoiden,’ answered Mrs. Gordon.

‘ She rides to please her horse now, but she’ll have him as quiet as yours before long,’ rejoined her son, both a little angry and a little amused at her being called a hoiden who was to him like an angel grown young with æonian life.

‘ Yes,’ resumed his mother, as if she *would* be fair, ‘ she does ride well ! If only she were a lady, that I might ask her to ride with me ! After all it’s none of my business what she is—so long as *you* don’t want to

marry her!' she concluded, with an attempt at a laugh.

'But I do want to marry her, mother!' rejoined Francis.

A short year before, his mother would have said what was in her heart, and it would not have been pleasant to hear; but now she was afraid of her son, and was silent. But it added to her torture that she must be silent. To be dethroned in castle Weelset by the daughter of one of her own tenants, for as such she thought of them, was indeed galling. 'The impudent quean!' she said to herself, 'she's ridden on her horse into the heart of the laird!' But for the wholesome consciousness of her own shame, which she felt that her son was always sparing, she would have raged like a fury.

'You that might have had any lady in the land!' she said at length.

'If I might, mother, it would be just as vain to look for her equal.'

'You might at least have shown your mother the

respect of choosing a lady to sit in her place! You drive me from the house!’

‘Mother,’ said Francis, ‘I have twice asked Kirsty Barclay to be my wife, and she has twice refused me.’

‘You may try her again: she had her reasons! She never meant to let you slip! If you got disgusted with her afterwards, she would always have her refusal of you to throw in your teeth.’

Francis laid his hand on his mother’s, and stopped her horse.

‘Mother, you compel me!’ he said. ‘When I came home ill, and, as I thought, dying, you called me bad names, and drove me from the house. Kirsty found me in a hole in the earth, actually dying then, and saved my life.’

‘Good heavens, Francis! Are you mad still? How dare you tell such horrible falsehoods of your own mother? You never came near me! You went straight to Corbyknowe!’

‘Ask Mrs. Bremner if I speak the truth. She ran out after me, but could not get up with me. You

drove me out; and if you do not know it now, you do not need to be told how it is that you have forgotten it.'

She knew what he meant, and was silent.

'Then Kirsty went to Edinburgh, to sir Haco Macintosh, and with his assistance brought me to my right mind. If it were not for Kirsty, I should be in my grave, or wandering the earth a maniac. Even alive and well as I am, I should not be with you now had she not shown me my duty.'

'I thought as much! All this tyranny of yours, all your late insolence to your mother, comes from the power of that low-born woman over you! I declare to you, Francis Gordon, if you marry her, I will leave the house.'

He made her no answer, and they rode the rest of the way in silence. But in that silence things grew clearer to him. Why should he take pains to persuade his mother to a consent which she had no right to withhold? His desire was altogether reasonable: why should its fulfilment depend on the unreason of

one who had not strength to order her own behaviour ? He had to save her, not to please her, gladly as he would have done both !

When he had helped her from the saddle, he would have remounted and ridden at once to Corbyknowe, but feared leaving her. She shut herself in her room till she could bear her own company no longer, and then went to the drawing-room, where Francis read to her, and played several games of backgammon with her. Soon after dinner she retired, saying her ride had wearied her ; and the moment Francis knew she was in bed, he got his horse, and galloped to the Knowe.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE CORONATION

WHEN he arrived, there was no light in the house : all had gone to rest. Unwilling to disturb the father and mother, he rode quietly to the back of the house, where Kirsty's room looked on the garden. He called her softly. In a moment she peeped out, then opened her window.

‘ Cud ye come doon a minute, Kirsty ?’ said Francis.

‘ I’ll be wi’ ye in less time,’ she replied ; and he had hardly more than dismounted, when she was by his side.

He told her what had passed between him and his mother since she left them.

‘ It’s a rael bonny nicht !’ said Kirsty, ‘ and we’ll jist

tak oor time to turn the thing ower—that is, gien ye bena tired, Francie. Come, we'll put the beastie up first.'

She led the horse into the dark stable, took his bridle off, put a halter on him, slackened his girths, and gave him a feed of corn—all in the dark; which things done, she and her lover set out for the Horn.

The whole night seemed thinking of the day that was gone. All doing seemed at an end, yea God himself to be resting and thinking. The peace of it sank into their bosoms, and filled them so, that they walked a long way without speaking. There was no wind, and no light but the starlight. The air was like the clear dark inside some diamonds. The only sound that broke the stillness as they went was the voice of Kirsty, sweet and low—and it was as if the dim starry vault thought, rather than she uttered, the words she quoted:—

‘Summer Night, come from God,
On your beauty, I see,
A still wave has flowed
Of Eternity!’

At a certain spot on the ridge of the Horn, Francis stopped.

‘This is whaur ye left me this time last year, Kirsty,’ he said; ‘—left me wi’ my Maker to mak a man o’ me. It was ’maist makin me ower again!’

There was a low stone just visible among the heather; Kirsty seated herself upon it. Francis threw himself among the heather, and lay looking up in her face.

‘That mother o’ yours is ’maist ower muckle for ye, Francie!’ said Kirsty.

‘It’s no aften, Kirsty, ye tell me what I ken as weel’s yersel!’ returned Francis.

‘Weel, Francie, ye maun tell *me* something the night!—Gien it wudna mismuve ye, I wad fain ken hoo ye wan throu that day we pairtit here.’

Without a moment’s hesitation, Francis began the tale—giving her to know, however, that in what took place there was much he did not understand so as to tell it again.

When he made an end, Kirsty rose and said,

‘Wad ye please to sit upo’ that stane, Francie!’

In pure obedience he rose from the heather, and sat upon the stone.

She went behind him, and clasped his head, round the temples, with her shapely, strong, faithful hands.

‘I ken ye noo for a man, Francis. Ye hae set yersel to du *his* wull, and no yer ain: ye’re a king, and for want o’ a better croon, I croon ye wi’ my twa han’s.’

Little thought Kirsty how near she came, in word and deed, to the crowning of Dante by Virgil, as recorded toward the close of the Purgatorio.

Then she came round in front of him, he sitting bewildered and taking no part in the solemn ceremony save that of submission, and knelt slowly down before him, laying her head on his knees, and saying,—

‘And here’s yer kingdom, Francis—my heid and my hert! Du wi’ me what ye wull.’

‘Come hame wi’ me, and help save my mother,’ he answered, in a voice choked with emotion.

‘I wull,’ she said, and would have risen; but he

laid his hands on her head, and thus they remained for a time in silence. Then they rose, and went.

They had gone about half-way to the farm before either spoke. Then Kirsty said,—

‘Francie, there’s ae thing I maun beg o’ ye, and but ane—at ye winna desire me to tak the heid o’ yer table. I canna but think it an ungracious thing ’at a young wuman like me, the son’s wife, suld put the man’s ain mother, his father’s wife, oot o’ the place whaur his father set her. I’m layin doon no prenciple; I’m sayin only hoo it affecs me. I want to come hame as her dochter, no as mistress o’ the hoose in her stead. And ye see, Francie, that’ll gie ye anither haud o’ her, agen disgracin o’ hersel! Promise me, Francie, and I’ll sune tak the maist pairt o’ the trouble o’ her aff o’ yer han’s.’

‘Ye’re aye richt, Kirsty!’ answered Francis. ‘As ye wull.’

CHAPTER XLIV

KIRSTY'S TOCHER

THE next morning, Kirsty told her parents that she was going to marry Francie.

‘Ye du richt, my bairn,’ said her father. ‘He’s come in sicht o’ ’s high callin, and it’s no possible for ye langer to refuse him.’

‘But, eh! what am I to du wantin ye, Kirsty?’ moaned her mother.

‘Ye min’, mother,’ answered Kirsty, ‘hoo I wad be oot the lang day wi’ Steenie, and ye never thought ye hadna me!’

‘Na, never. I aye kenned I had the twa o’ ye.’

‘Weel, it’s no a God’s-innocent but a deil’s-gowk I’ll hae to luik efter noo, and I maun come hame ilka

possible chance to get hertenin frae you and my father, or I winna be able to bide it. Eh, mother, efter Steenie, it'll be awfu' to spen' the day wi *her* ! It's no 'at ever she'll be fou : I s' see to that !—it's 'at she'll aye be toom !—aye ringin wi toomness !'

Here Kirsty turned to her father, and said,—

' Wull ye gie me a tocher, father ?'

' Ay wull I, lassie,—what ye like, sae far as I hae 't to gie.'

' I want Donal—that's a'. Ye see I maun ride a heap wi' the puir thing, and I wud fain hae something aneth me 'at ye gae me ! The cratur'll aye hing to the Knowe, and whan I gie his wull he'll fess me hame o' himsel.—I wud hae likit things to bide as they are, but she wud hae worn puir Francie to the verra deid !'

CHAPTER XLV

KIRSTY'S SONG

MRS. GORDON manages the house, and her reward is to sit at the head of the table. But she pays Kirsty infinitely more for the privilege than any but Kirsty can know, in the form of leisure for things she likes far better than housekeeping—among the rest, for the discovery of such songs as this, the last of hers I have seen :—

LOVE IS HOME.

LOVE is the part, and love is the whole ;
Love is the robe, and love is the pall ;
Ruler of heart and brain and soul,
Love is the lord and the slave of all !
I thank thee, Love, that thou lov'st me ;
I thank thee more that I love thee.

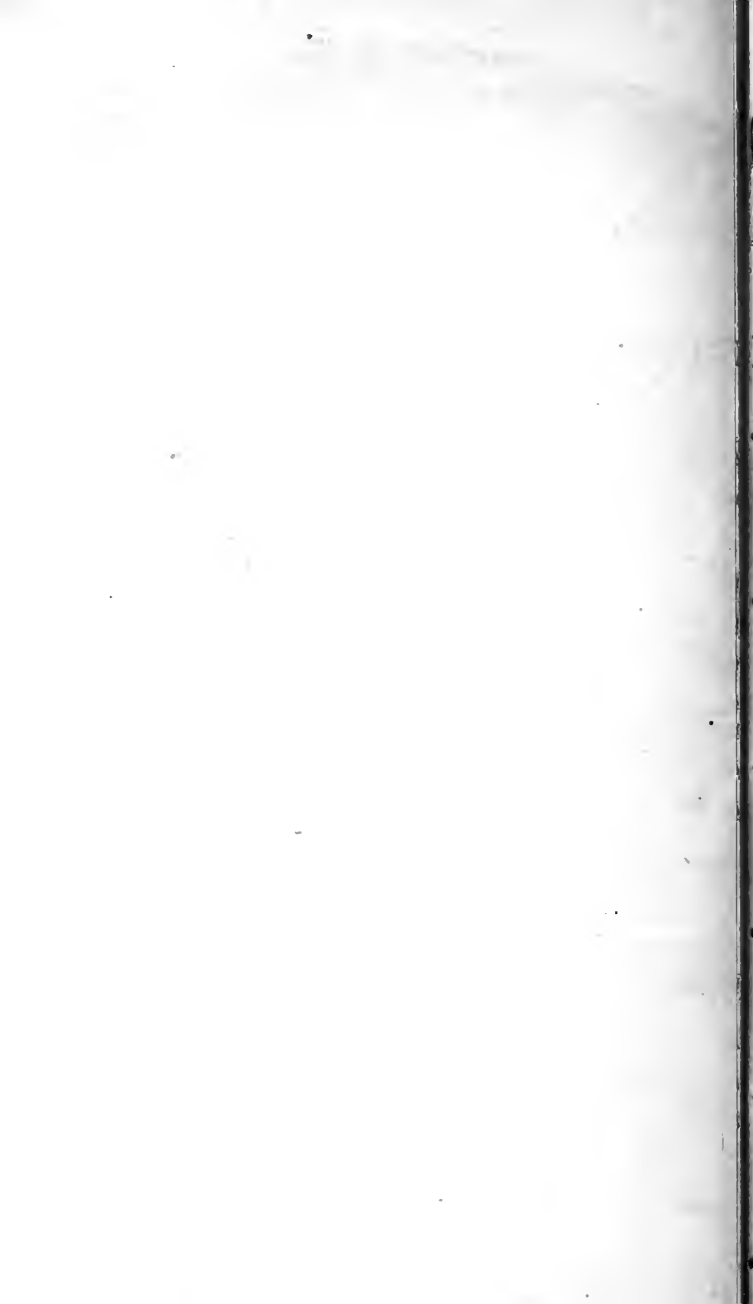
Love is the rain, and love is the air ;
Love is the earth that holdeth fast ;
Love is the root that is buried there,
Love is the open flower at last !
I thank thee, Love all round about,
That the eyes of my love are looking out.

Love is the sun, and love is the sea ;
Love is the tide that comes and goes ;
Flowing and flowing it comes to me ;
Ebbing and ebbing to thee it flows !
Oh my sun, and my wind, and tide !
My sea, and my shore, and all beside !

Light, oh light that art by showing ;
Wind, oh wind that liv'st by motion ;
Thought, oh thought that art by knowing ;
Will, that art born in self-devotion !
Love is you, though not all of you know it ;
Ye are not love, yet ye always show it !

Faithful creator, heart-longed-for father,
Home of our heart-infolded brother,
Home to thee all thy glories gather—
All are thy love, and there is no other !
O Love-at-rest ; we loves that roam—
Home unto thee, we are coming home !

THE END.



[March, 1893.]



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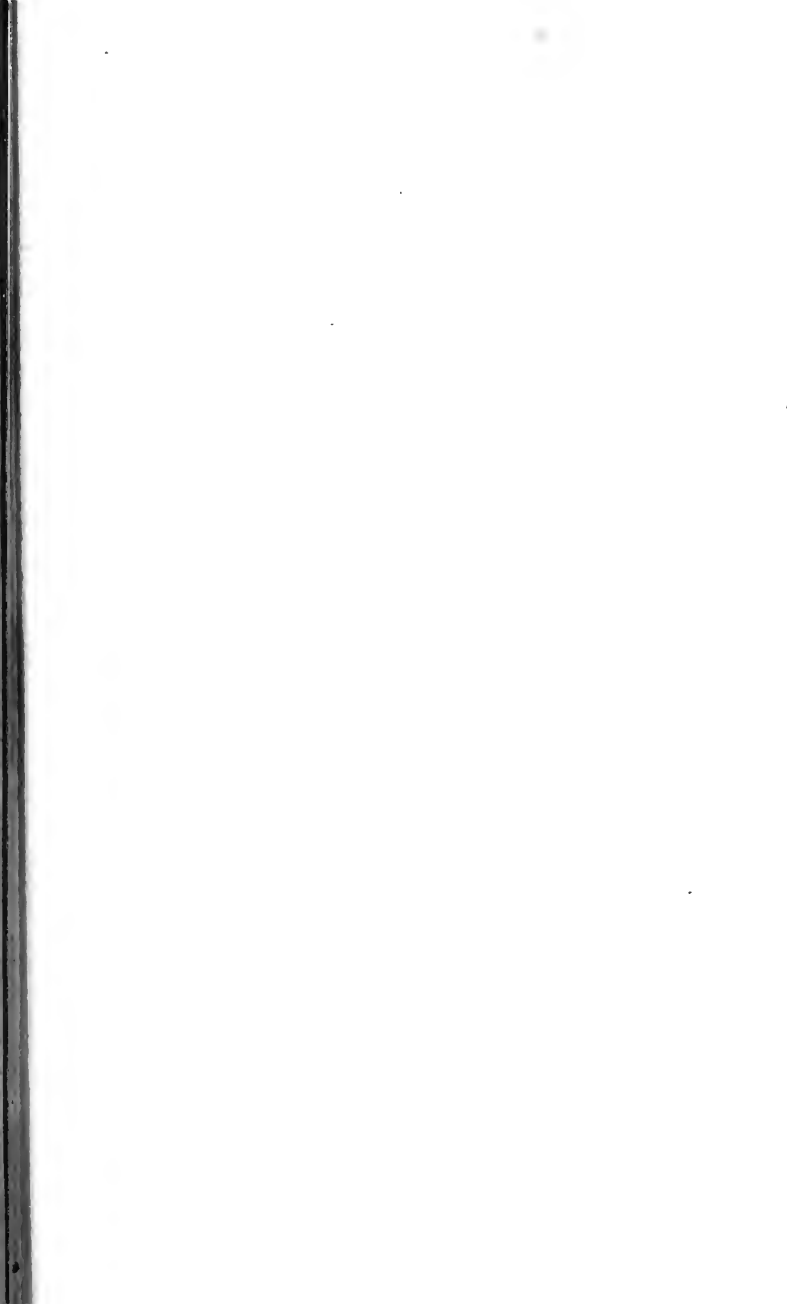
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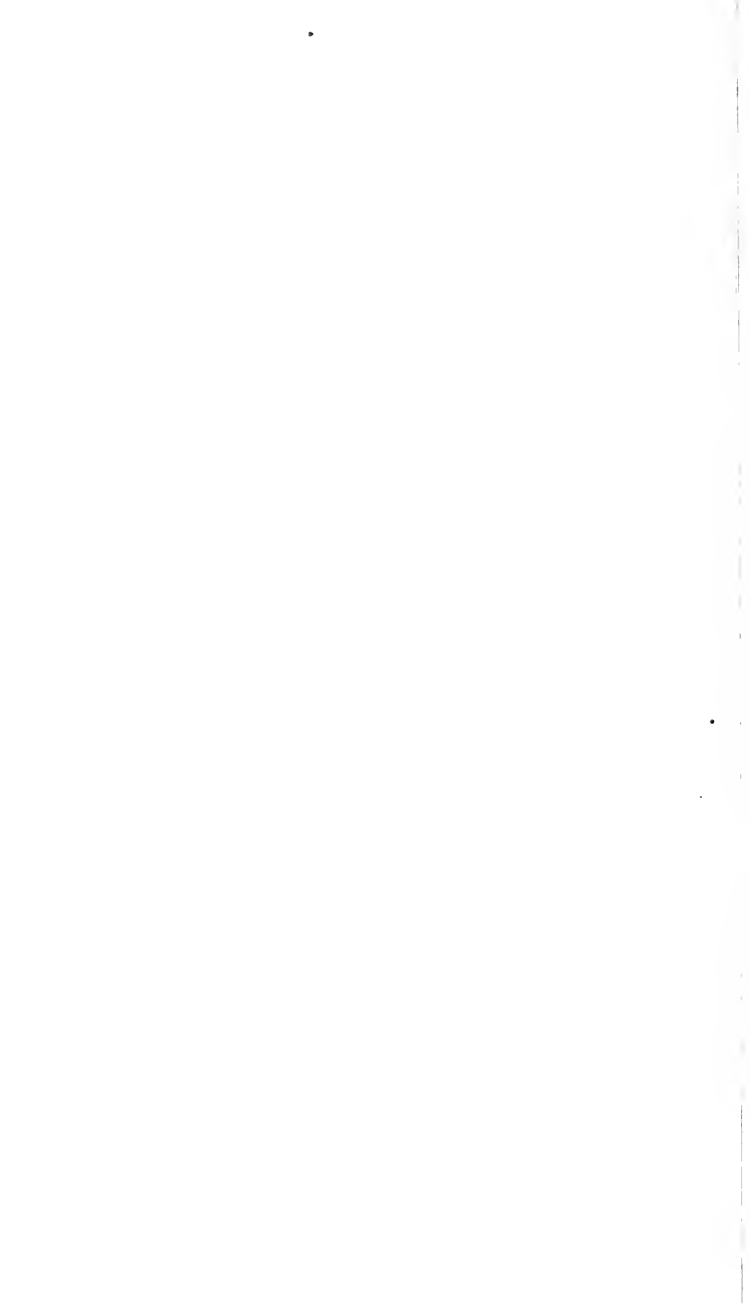
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